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KARIN OF SWEDEN

BY
WILHELM JENSEN

Specially translated for "Once a Week Library" by
MRS. WAUGH

ONCE A WEEK
SEMI-MONTHLY
LIBRARY

Pears' Soap

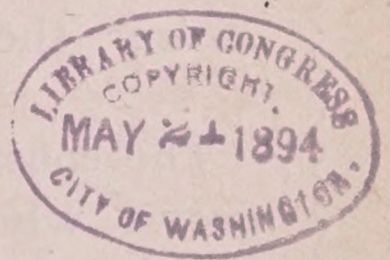
Pears' Soap does nothing but cleanse ; it has no medical properties, but brings back health and the color of health to many a sallow skin. Use it often. Give it time.

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Once a
week



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All's Well

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that ends well; all who have Coughs,
Colds and Throat Troubles are *made*
well by

Scott's

Emulsion

of Cod-liver Oil, with hypophosphites
of lime and Soda. When lungs are
affected Scott's Emulsion, if taken in
time, prevents consumption. *Phy-*
sicians, the world over, endorse it.

The consumption germ takes root and
grows when the body is weak and
emaciated. The germ passes off when
the body is strong.

Prepared by SCOTT & BOWNE, N. Y. Druggists sell it.

KARIN OF SWEDEN.

CHAPTER I.

THESE are the Falls of Trollhätta, which have rushed and roared for thousands and thousands of years before any human ear was there to hear them.

Far over the rocks they sprinkle their silvery dust, upon which the sun's rays are reflected back, shining and sparkling, in rainbow hues. Deep down beneath though, under the dazzling majestic veil, roll and toss the tumbling angry masses of water.

These are the Falls of Trollhätta, which have tumbled and roared for days and centuries past. The boy who once played beside them has grown into the man, the man into the veteran who crawls out, leaning on his strong staff, to gaze upon them for the last time. They are young and lusty as when first he saw them wreathed with flowers like spring, silver-white as winter.

It is well to sit beside the Trollhätta for him who would fain forget, who would drown memory in the cataract's perpetual roar.

They advance like a man's fate, transparent and peaceful, kissing the nodding grasses bend-

ing over them. Then there comes a slight whirl, a faster rush—imperceptible, unforeseen—and the peace, the transparency is gone never to return. And they rush on more impetuously, inevitably—ever lashed on faster, more furiously, until suddenly they are precipitated raging and tumbling into the engulfing depths beneath.

When the pioneers of humanity came hither from out the forests of the South to hunt the reindeer with their ironstone lances, flat-faced and cheek-bones projecting, their lank-brown hair falling over their copper-colored faces, their thin beards hanging down like withered grass, shaggy skins around their loins, they were greeted by the roar of the Trollhätta. Was it for years, or for thousands of years, that they sat by its waters? They wrote no annals of themselves. The waves of Trollhätta alone murmured their history, dyeing itself red in their blood shed by the white-faced conquerors borne across the Baltic in their clumsy ships.

Irrepressible, like a whirlwind, came on the nations of Europe, or like the waters of Trollhätta. Then resounded Odin's hymns of praise upon their shores, and his descendants, disembarking, ruled over the nations of the Goths and Swedes. Ynglinger, they called themselves, and proclaimed themselves Kings of Upsala. Centuries came and went—who would learn their history from out the gray cycles of the past, as they were precipitated never to return in the engulfing depths of Time, must learn it from the roar of the Trollhätta.

And once again the South gave birth to a new world-stirring movement, and the Baltic bore it across. To the rocky deserts of Schnee-hättan flew the message of Christianity, and a mighty race, called Folkungs, ascended the throne of Sweden. The boundaries of the empire extended wide; and with its increase grew desire, covetousness and despotism, and they who had risen highest were precipitated, maimed, into the depths below, as were those depths the raging waters of Trollhätta.

Then over the narrow arm which separates Sweden from Zealand came the descendants of those ancient Normans who had founded their Vikings kingdom on seagirt isles. Led by a firm hand, the little Danish nation encountered their mighty adversaries boldly; and Sweden, unnerved by party strife, fell a ready prey to it. But a very few miles from the Falls of Trollhätta at Falköping it fell into the hands of a woman, and Margaret of Denmark laid her arrogant, conquering hand upon the heads of Odin's grandchildren.

Gloomily and angrily roared the waters of Trollhätta. No one who sat by its sullen waves could fail to learn the story, as, dashing from the heights, it proclaimed the arrogance of the conqueror, or, rolling gloomily along to precipitate itself in the depths beneath, it muttered the shame of the conquered. Had Karl Knutson drank in their sound when, seizing his sword, he dashed asunder the Danish chains?

He perhaps; but not those who succeeded

him. Jealous of the power vested in one individual alone, the nobles would no longer suffer a king to reign over them. True, the actual government fell to Sten Sture, and, after him, to his son and grandson; yet the self-willed nobles only acknowledged them as "regents," taking advantage of every occasion to infringe upon their authority. Mournfully flowed the waters of Trollhätta; for Sweden's fame and greatness had become but a sham and deception. Over it lay the shadow of that Calmarian Union wrung from it by its first conqueror, Queen Margaret; a treaty by right of which the kings of Denmark also wore the crowns of Sweden and Norway. That none of their descendants were mighty enough to press that crown in reality upon their heads might deceive the short-sighted eyes of the Swedish nobles—the waters of Trollhätta only gave out a more warning note, presaging evil; they did not suffer themselves to be deceived as they eddied with thunderous roar toward Margaret's grandson when, sword in hand, he sprang ashore to seize by force the crown of the Calmarian Union. Once more they dashed on triumphantly when Christian the Second fled before Sten Sture at the bloody battle of Braimkyrka; but he came back, and Sten Sture fell. The firm, beneficent hand which, for his country's good, had bridled the perverse wills of the nobles, lay prone in the dust, and victoriously Christian the Second assumed the crown with far more willing assent from the Swedish nobles than had the aspirant

to that crown been from among their midst. The coronation took place in the church in Stockholm; and Holy Communion was administered to the king upon his solemn oath to preserve the Constitution of Sweden, and to take no revenge for the past. This was in the month of November. For three whole days there were public rejoicings in the streets of Stockholm; night was turned into day, for in the royal palace the lights were not extinguished until the sun rose to dim them. There was high revelry, the assembled Swedish nobles clinking goblets together in praise of the most hospitable of kings, and Christian the Second, moving smiling among the throng of nobles intoxicated alike with joy and wine, embraced the bishops, kissed the Senators, and heartily shook hands with the Mayor of Stockholm. And then the king, joyously clapping his hands, himself sung a merry song in honor of his wine-heated guests. But the waters of Trollhätta flowed still more gloomily, mysteriously, whirling the withered leaves shaken toward them by the autumn wind ruthlessly down into the deep watery abyss.

Three centuries and a half have gone by since that November.

Fine and lovely was this November day in 1520. The setting sun gilded the red roofs of the Naples of the North, reflecting itself crimson red upon the calm surface of the Lake of Mälar. To the distant beholder the peace of autumn lay spread over Sweden's capital; the

stillness, too, of autumn, in strange contrast to the noisy revelry which but now had reigned in streets and market. Even now the central portions of Sweden appear but sparsely populated for their size; yet their population is increased fivefold from what it then was. The vast lakes and rocks remain; but between them now lie many miles of fruitful, cultivated land, which, in those days, were dreary wastes. Three immeasurable stretches of water—the Lakes of Mälar, Hjelmar and Wener—spread away from east to west almost straight across the whole extent of the kingdom, and somewhat more to the south the vast surface of the Wetter Lake unites itself to them. Between them alternate valleys and rocky heights, dark fir-covered mountains and sunny beech-woods. And upon all these, as upon the red roofs of the capital, lay the setting sun of that November day, mild and peaceful as though it were the herald of May—spring-time of the North—instead of December. So it rested upon the silent waters of the Lake of Hjelmar, and upon the long, noiseless extent of Mälar as it lazily washed up against the great stone steps of the Palace of Stockholm. It glistened upon the tall spires of village churches, and the battlemented strongholds of the Swedish nobles rising between the shining lakes from out the autumn-hued foliage; and further west it shone upon the ocean-like surface of the Lake of Wener, with its countless islands, from which, at its southern point, the wide Göta-Elf flows into the Cat-gat.

Beyond lie the Falls of Trollhätta.

The boatman on the Lake of Wener hears from afar its warning sound in the surrounding stillness; the shepherd in the fields hears it miles away; the bird of passage high in the air in alarm wings its flight aside from the din, ever-increasing as it is neared. Then the ear grows deafened, the eye alone shudderingly takes in the white, foaming mass, dashing with thunderous roar over the sheer, ragged rocks into the awful depths beneath.

It falls on to the bare, precipitous walls of the gorge which rise perpendicularly—walls as though raised by giant hand to compel the wild, raging waters to keep within bounds. Only here and there upon the precipitous sides stands a solitary tree, on a flattened rock, swaying its bent crest westward in the evening wind, messenger of the setting sun. Across the Wener Lake come these gusts of wind at long intervals over the brown moss straggling over the rocks at the head of the cataract; and when, following the declining sun, they sweep over it, with invisible hand noiselessly they strip the last leaves from the tree-tops and draw them sportively over the sheer precipice to the edge of the abyss beneath. Merrily they dance over the brown earth. Another second, and the damp drizzle of the Trollhätta has seized them, dragging them down in its whirl. One after another, ever the same evening game in which, in its solitude, melancholy Nature seems to take

delight, careless whether viewed by human eye or not.

Suddenly a hand is outstretched to seize one of the leaves chasing its companion. Then there are human eyes there to see. A pair of great, silent eyes.

Rocky ground, sparsely covered with moss and heather, stretched up for some hundred feet above the verge of the Trollhätta to the bare heights upon which stood three of those trees, raising up their leafless branches against the blue horizon. Here and there was a flat rocky prominence standing out slab-like, or rising from out the ground like a gigantic arm-chair, and it was from one of these, in close proximity to the central tree, that the hand was outstretched. It was so small, the fingers so transparent and delicate, that it resembled none other than that of Freya, as with silver reins she guided her golden steeds.

Now the rounded arm, white as sculptured marble, is raised, like the trees, against the blue horizon, and sheds a white lustrous light around.

Is it Freya who, descended to seek Odur, sits thus upon the ancient Odin Stone? Poets sang of her; her eyes were perpetual spring, her face as the light of day. And all was light that went forth from her. Golden the light from her hair, which, parted in the middle, hung down over the gray rock upon which she sat. The evening sun, shedding its last rays upon it, made it difficult to decide where the golden

hair ended and sunlight began. Against the blue vault of Heaven it stood out. So the miner, when deep down in the bowels of the earth at work upon rough stone, suddenly lights upon a vein of precious mineral. His first thought is not of the possession, not the worth that it represents; but dreamily, in strange agitation, he stands and gazes with speechless enchantment upon the sweet, silent secret of Nature. So she sat there, a sweet, silent secret, risen up for one moment from out the depths of Trollhätta to bathe her ivory brow in the golden glow of the setting sun. Was she wet, was she cold in her chilly bed that she had ascended to earth to let the rosy light flood her cheeks once more ere the long winter changed her into frozen stone in her dark imprisonment? No, the light that went out from her proved the contrary. Had the depths converted her hair into liquid gold, her arms, brow, and neck to shining alabaster? There were no jewels in those depths from which Nature could have conjured such eyes. They were of the upper world, born of the Northern skies, which had lent them its fairy light, its melancholy and joyousness, its unspeakable charm of laughter and pathos.

She might be any one of its lovely goddesses. Gefione, the goddess of chastity, protectress of maidenhood. Hylla, of the beautiful locks, and Gna, who floats upon the sunbeam. Hlyn, who kisses away the tears of earthly sorrow with her soft lips. Sicœna, who with her divine hand stirs up the sweetest feelings of the heart. Or

Löbna, she might be, before whose limpid eyes no hatred or discord can endure. Wara, whose clear eyes search out every secret of the heart; or Synia, lovely warder of Heaven.

From these all the poets chose out the loveliest attributes to form Freya, queen of the goddesses of Walhalla. From her eyes went out perpetual spring. The mind of man could devise no more entrancing conception. Then the Fates added grief at Odur's death to the light of perpetual spring in Freya's eyes.

Lovely as the spring, pathetic as the grief which lay in the eyes of Walhalla's goddess, was the maiden sitting upon the Runic stone of Trollhätta. Now standing up, her shadow fell across the foaming water beneath. A long garment of simple material clothed her youthful figure from the half bare neck to her feet; it lay in folds across her bosom in fashion like a Grecian tunic; the costly girdle which held it together was worked with gold and silver threads. Beneath the simple-hued tunic was an under garment of finest white linen, with full sleeves reaching to the elbow. Besides the solitary, fairy-like figure of the maiden, there seemed to be no living being as far as the eye could reach. Movement there certainly was as the wind, growing stronger, swung back the branches of the tree, and blew across the low undergrowth which stretched sideways to the very brink of the falls. But neither the noise of the wind nor the creaking of the branches were audible; the roar of Trollhätta

swallowing up every lesser sound in its tremendous thunder. Even the rustle among the thick yellow leaves overhead was lost. The wind blew up in sudden gusts, rattling the dry leaves furiously; then again all would be still, saving in one part where the leaves continued to rustle restlessly. It was as though there were an aspen tree among the lower range; but the spasmodic movement appeared now here, now there, and the strange thing was that the restless spot appeared to move in an oblique line over the declivity toward the river.

Yet, as we have said, no ear, however keen, could have heard it; the eye alone, catching sight of the stirring branches, could have detected it. For one moment it seemed as if the youthful fairy of the Trollhätta had become sensible of it. Turning from the sun, which had sunk in rosy glow beneath the horizon, she was looking up-stream. But the ball of fire had dazzled her vision, and just then a gust of wind from the Lake of Wener, passing over, shook the trees on the slope, bringing something with it somewhat like the leaf toward which she had before stretched out her hand. But this was no leaf, but another lovely frequenter of the Trollhätta, child of northern mountain solitude, upon which Nature had, in its kind, lavished equal loveliness as upon the maiden. It somewhat resembled the Apollo, that exquisite butterfly with its great shining eyes set on a white ground. The resemblance was even greater, as the rare insect now, seized by the

gust and vainly struggling against it, seemed about to be carried past her to the watery depths. For an instant she followed it with her eyes, then darted impulsively after it in childish precipitation down the declivity.

Some fifty feet above her, from the spot where at that moment the aspen seemed to be, a head rose from out the withered branches and gazed in wonderment at the white figure hastening after the butterfly. Then the expression of amazement in the man's keen gray eyes changed to one of alarm, seeming to inspire the strong arms. So hurriedly did they force a passage through the underwood that, even despite the din of Trollhätta, he might have been heard even down by the river below. Yet the girl did not hear, or seemed to pay no heed to the sound. All her thoughts and energies were bent upon rescuing her lovely resemblance ere the gust had irrevocably borne it into the fine spray, which, veil-like, surrounded the rushing cataract. Now she would stretch out her hand to seize the reeling butterfly, then she seemed as if fearing to press it too closely; for the delicate fingers were as undecided and halting as her feet had been sure and steady in their perilous descent. Truly it looked a dangerous position, and was so even more than it looked. The owner of the gray eyes, who had followed her to within some twenty paces, realized the full peril—it needed but a loose stone, a slip, a stumble, and the girl must inevitably roll down into the whirlpool of the angry waters, which, but a few arms-

lengths from her, threatened to hide her loveliness forever in their yawning abyss.

In vain. The young man's loud, wellnigh angry shout of warning was lost in the roar of the cataract, to which she had now approached so close. In vain, too, her eagerness to save the other imperiled one, which the Trollhätta in demoniacal power seemed about to engulf. For a second the butterfly still struggled against the fine, wetting dust which had caught it, then with heavy wings it fell helplessly upon the surface of the water, at the very moment that the girl's hand, far outstretched, caught it. As she did so the loose tuft of turf on which her knee was resting gave way, and she uttered a faint cry, as she strove in vain with the other hand to clutch at something steadying. A mighty wave shot past; it was as if a giant's white arm had upstretched from the Trollhätta to clutch the golden hair, as if a peal of mocking, bewildering laughter rose up from out the foaming depths.

The treacherous grass sank lower and lower.

"Gustavus!" cried the girl in terrified accents.
"Gustavus!"

"Here I am!" was the answer, as madly dashing, like some wild animal, through the remaining stumps of brushwood, he came stumbling down, pulling himself short up on the very edge of the deadly bank; with powerful grip, steadying himself with one hand, even in his descent he had thrown the other round the imprudent girl's waist, just as the fatal water

had touched her shoulder. With superhuman strength he tore her back from the arms of the Trollhätta.

It was the work of an instant, and more quickly still the girl, supported by the strong arm, had regained her feet, and was looking with grateful but with astonished expression into the face of her preserver. The hand she was in the act of outstretching was drawn back in embarrassment.

The stranger, on his side, looked at her in surprise; but it was evident that his amaze was merely caused by the marvelous loveliness of the girl. He was a man of about thirty, tall, with irregular features, but more finely cut and expressive than is the usual type of Swedish faces. His dark hair fell disheveled over his face; his clothes, too, bore evidence to the recent struggle with thorns and brushwood. Observing the girl's hesitation, as she held out her hand, the corners of his mouth dropped with a sarcastic expression.

"Is your life so little worth to you, that you cannot even shake hands with your rescuer?" he asked, annoyed.

The tone was even more unseemly than the words. A bright flush suffused the girl's face; she drew up her slim figure in maidenly pride, and an equally angry reply hovered upon her lips. But she seemed to reflect that, uncouth as had been the words, the thought which had inspired them was the truth, and that but for

his strong arm she had not been standing by his side; so answered gently,

"I thought you were—"

He interrupted her shortly. "I not only thought that you called me, but am positive that you did so. My ears bore witness to it, as surely as did my eyes, that but for me you would have been dashed down like the butterfly you were so imprudently chasing. You know this as well as I do; and, moreover, that, in accordance with the unquestioned custom of our country, I have the right to demand a kiss; and that I am, besides, singularly unexacting when I demand no other reward than this."

As he spoke he abruptly seized her hand in his firm grasp and kissed it. She had been at first mustering him with calm gaze, then her eyes sank, she knew not why. She even allowed her hand to remain in his. There was right in what he had said; and even had there not been, there was something in his manner which allowed of no opposition. She had no fear—what harm could come to her from the man who but now had risked his own life to save hers?—but as she passively yielded him the one hand, she glanced timidly down at the other, in which she still held captive the butterfly she had saved. Cautiously extending his antennæ, the Apollo was crawling out from between the fingers of his preserver's hand; it seemed to know that the warm hand had done him good service, for it did not attempt to fly away, but remained fearlessly sitting upon it like a white

blossom, only from time to time flapping its wings with their red eyes, as if in gratitude. The young man, too, looked silently at it for a moment, then said vehemently:

"Do you not know that it is the rule to leave those fools, who rush voluntarily into danger, to their own fate? You have now learned that otherwise they have a way of dragging their preservers down into the abyss with them. Who would have saved me, had I been such a fool as—as you!" he ended up, with a short, grating laugh.

The girl felt a sudden sense of oppression. Was it the chill of evening, was it the singular demeanor of the stranger on this solitary rocky precipice? "I have no fear of the Trollhätta," she replied, gently. "It has been familiar to me from childhood, and has never harmed me."

"The Trollhätta!" repeated her strange companion, in surprise. "Is this your Trollhätta of which you make so much ado? Let's see how wild your far-famed monster really is!"

And with precipitate spring he alighted on a rocky slab hanging sheer over the torrent of the cataract, bending daringly over to look down. This time it was the girl who uttered a terrified cry. He did not hear it, but only read it, as he turned, from the movement of her lips and the expression of her face, and came back laughing, as he pushed back the wet hair from his brow.

"That is refreshing to the hare when the hounds are after her. Your Trollhätta is a fine fellow," he said merrily. "Would you

have been glad if I had rolled down there?" and he lightly pointed to it.

The girl looked silently at him with scared expression. Doubts seemed to have arisen within her whether the mind beneath that finely-molded brow was not somewhat unhinged. Without awaiting her answer, he continued:

"Bah! you would not have troubled to climb down to see what had become of my bones; but the hounds would have lost scent in the water, and their master have well belabored them for thanks."

He frowned darkly, then seized the girl's slight wrist so violently that it hurt her, and, despite her resistance, drew her several paces riverward, saying: as he looked in its direction:

"How should a deaf person, seeing the river sport with the flowers upon its banks, as the setting sun is reflected upon its calm surface, and its waters flow on so clear, transparent, and unsuspected; how should he believe, maiden, that in its depths the sinister current is already tearing along that shall engulf him—if he heedlessly trust himself to it—and in a few short seconds mockingly hurl him into the long-prepared abyss beneath? And yet I tell you, your Trollhätta is child's play compared with a certain current I know of, which sports even more gently with flowers, whose smiles are even more brilliant and sunny, that embraces and caresses and strokes your cheeks. And those

upon its banks are all blind and deaf; they see not the abyss which yawns before them; they hear not the thundering din which shall drown their death cries— Ha! ha! ha! Think of me, maiden, when you next hear of it—it is called—” Then, interrupting his speech abruptly: “What is your name?” he asked, roughly.

“Katharine Stenbock.”

She had replied simply, without accentuating the name, although one of the greatest in Sweden. This was apparent by the impression it made upon the stranger, who, starting back, said, looking full at his companion, yet in tones of unmistakable chivalrous courtesy:

“By Heavens! The blindness of this land must be infectious, else had I known you at first sight, Rose of Trollhätta. Or rather”—and there was a singular charm in the winning smile which accompanied his words—“I had formed quite another idea of you from the songs of your beauty, Karin; for the eyes of our national troubadours are as bedimmed as are their swords. I thank you. I must tell you that I have a certain impulse within me toward crazy actions; and now I may feel that I have accomplished something for immortality, in that I have saved the Rose of Trollhotta.”

Karin Stenbock blushed slightly; the stranger's concluding words accused her of injustice, in having for a moment doubted his sanity. And yet there was a feeling within her that she ought not to have listened to them. But how could she have done otherwise, when she

remembered that to him she owed her life? Moreover, there was a something in his speech, in the unspoken thoughts, perhaps even more, that drew her mysteriously toward him. As in her eyes, so in his, lay the changeful expression of Freya's grief for her lost and loved ones.

So the girl stood, more lovely than ever in her indecision, looking down to the ground. For the space of a minute a speechless fascination seemed to have taken possession of the only two living beings in that rocky solitude. It grew dusk, the wind was rising, blowing up dark clouds from the Lake of Wener. Yet the young man seemed to have become oblivious of the aim and object of his coming; his eyes resting with a dreamy look, hitherto strange to them, upon Karin's lovely, half-averted face.

"It grows dark, I must go home," she said at last. He still stood immovable. She had gone a few steps riverward, then turned back. She wanted to ask something; but, unlike herself, felt embarrassed, and could not frame the words. Now as, with abrupt movement, he swept his hand over his brow, the old expression came back to his eyes, the former tone to his voice, as he curtly asked:

"Is Stenbock—is your father in Stockholm?"

She shook her golden head.

"He wanted to go, but he had hurt his foot and could not mount his horse. I was glad of it."

"You were glad of it? Did you begrudge him the kiss of Christian of Denmark?"

"One should not accept the hospitality of one's enemy. It is not honorable—and—not prudent," she added, more slowly.

Once more the stranger stepped quickly up to her.

"You speak a harsh judgment against the nobles of this land. Enemy? Are you aware that that word could cost you your head? King Christian of Denmark is now King of Sweden. He is your sovereign lord; and if he deigns to honor your father's house with a visit you may find yourself in the enviable position of the new Dove of Amsterdam."

Karin proudly raised her head; her only answer a flashing light from her eyes, which shot like a volcanic flame, irradiating her face.

"And if you were compelled by *force majeure*?" he added, hastily.

"I would curse you that your hand had drawn me back!" she said, with trembling lips, as she pointed to the rushing water.

The stranger's words had suddenly opened the sluice-gates of a stream in the delicate girl's heart, hitherto unsuspected by her, raging within her, and which threatened to carry her headlong to destruction as surely as could the Falls of Trollhätta. Now as quickly restraining herself, she resumed, in her usual voice:

"I know not who you may be, who think to terrify a girl. There are still men enough in

Sweden ready to shed their blood to save the daughters of the land from such shame."

The question she had so long essayed to ask lay in her first words; yet he whom it concerned appeared not to have heeded it. He merely said, half-sarcastically:

"You have good courage, Rose of Trollhätta. Do you know any such man? Do you know his name?"

A defiant look crossed Karin's face.

"Did I name but one; there has been many a man, worthy the name of such, who has proved himself ready to save his fellow-men from slavery. Yes," she continued with rising displeasure, looking defiantly into the young man's searching eyes, bent full upon her, "did I trust to no other arm than that of Gustavus Ericsson--"

She stopped in alarm, for her companion burst into a laugh so harsh and grating that it made the rocks ring again.

"Do you know Gustavus Ericsson, Karin Stenbock?" he asked.

Half-nervously, half-annoyed, she silently shook her head.

Grinding his teeth, he resumed, after a pause:

"You see, you only repeat what you have heard from others; but I will tell you the manner of man your would-be preserver is. He flees like a hare from place to place to escape the Danish bloodhounds. He sees women and children maltreated by Christian's bondmen and stops his ears to their cries; he hears the lamentations of

his people, and has no other consolation for them than empty curses. He is a cowardly scoundrel who creeps into ditches o' nights not to endanger his precious life; a sparrow, who vows vengeance against the vulture which has broken into his nest; and who is frightened at the sound of the clash of steel; who starts back unmanned if a dry branch but crackle in the wood—”

He broke off, as if to give color to his last words, and looked sharply round. The wind, which was driving up the storm clouds ever faster, preceded them, rattling the branches of the underwood audibly. A few premonitory drops of rain began to fall with sharp rustle upon the withered leaves. For a few seconds the young man remained in listening attitude, then, turning quickly to the girl, he said:

“Karin Stenbock, I must stay to-night in your father's house. Do not be angry with me. You seem to think somewhat favorably of Gustavus Ericsson. I did not mean to be so hard upon him. Grief for his fate, for his country, made me speak as I did—not dislike to the man.”

“I do not know him; that is, I have never seen him face to face,” she answered, quietly. “Yet, withal, I believe I know him better than you do.”

“Think you so, maiden? I, too, have never seen him face to face; there has ever been some invincible obstacle in the way, and I wellnigh fear such will follow me all my life. But I have heard him—that is, heard of him—often;

and you may, perhaps, be right. Continue to defend him, Rose of Trollhätta. Perhaps the time may come when it may be in his power to repay you. And, by Heaven! as I know Gustavus Ericsson, were he in a position to strike the crown from the head of Christian of Denmark, only to lay it at the feet of Karin Stenbock, he would do it in gratitude that she still believed in him when he had ceased to believe in himself, and had given himself up to his pursuers. And just because you spoke thus of him, have I asked you if I might pass the night in your father's house; for I, too, am pursued and hunted by the Danish dogs as he is, and the kindness you would show me will be shown to one who hates the enemies of your people as fiercely as ever does Gustavus Vasa."

The words were spoken with such grace and noble pride that Karin involuntarily held out her hand to him. "Come," said she. "Although you will not tell me your name, if you be an enemy to Denmark, I bid you welcome to Gustavus Stenbock's house."

Once more the stranger's face expressed astonishment. "Have not bad times made you more cautious, Karin?" he asked. "Do you know who I am? What if I were one of Christian's spies leading you and yours to destruction? And at best—you know the Danish king's threats against whoever shelters an outlaw. After all, what matters it if one more nameless fugitive meets his fate, rather than that your whole house should suffer? I

thank you for the good will, Karin, but I have slept too many a night under heaven's canopy to dread yet another. So, farewell—"

"It may be that you are better acquainted with Gustavus Ericsson than I am, but you little know Gustavus Stenbock if you think that fear could hinder his affording shelter and protection to any friend of Sweden," interposed Karin, gravely. "As to what you said before, I do not think that mistrust can win back freedom to any people, and I do think—" she hesitated for a moment, and looked full at him.

"What, Karin?" he asked.

"That did it depend upon you, Sweden's freedom would be restored," she concluded, simply.

An almost perceptible thrill of joy passed through the young man's frame. He followed her now, without further mention of the problem he had put to her, down the side of the hill, whence they had watched the setting sun. In the west the sky was still blue, the bright golden girdle which encircled the horizon in that direction raying out like a Northern light to the zenith, while from the east masses of ever darker clouds were chasing one another, amid which—rare sight in the North at that season—a bluish light ever and anon seemed to flicker. The rocks they were climbing were not high, but tolerably steep, and arrived at the top, they paused for a moment to recover breath. The stranger looked round about him. From where they were standing they could see far

away to south, east and west; to the north the still higher ascent of the Trollhätta shut out the view.

"The storm is over from Stockholm," he murmured, between his teeth. "I thought so. The last few days were too bright to last."

"That is the past. There lies Sweden's future," said the girl, pointing confidently to the golden glow in the west.

He smiled bitterly.

"But it is sinking before our very eyes, and our day will be over before it return." He stamped his foot violently on the ground, with wild look. "Cursed be he who thinks it!" he broke forth, impetuously. "Cursed be he who does not dare his all for his country's freedom! Cursed be thy beauty, Rose of Trollhätta, if thou sufferest it to reward another than Sweden's deliverer!"

A first, long roll of thunder formed accompaniment to the vehement words. Karin hastened on, her face flushed crimson, down the side of the more gently sloping declivity. Her heart was beating loudly, and her hand trembled so violently that the butterfly, still resting peacefully upon it, with folded wings, began nervously moving its antennæ. The heavy rain drops fell more thickly upon them. Before them, in the twilight, rose a dense mass of trees, limes which had already shed their leaves and elms still in full foliage. In among them was visible the roof of an ancient castle-like building.

"Is that Torpa?" asked the stranger.

Karin silently nodded assent.

"And is Brita Rosen, your mother, at home?"

Again acquiescing, she looked at him in amazement. "You appear to know us, and it seems to me that it were but right that I could say the same of you, whom I am admitting to the protection of my father's roof."

"You are right, Karin. It was folly in me to withhold my poor name so long," he replied, quickly. "My name is Gustavus Folkung. And if I may ask a further favor of you; I would beg you not to take me to your parents, and to tell no one that you have met me. I know that your men will have left off work in the out-buildings by now. Suffer me to slip into the stables, and spend the night on the straw."

She repeated the name "Gustavus Folkung!" then added thoughtfully: "I have heard of you. You are a friend to Sweden. It is strange that all who bear the name of Gustavus are. No!" she exclaimed, rousing herself from her meditation, and addressing her companion in a changed voice; "that is not how you must pass the night, Herr Folkung. You are weary and need a comfortable couch. There is ample space in our house to shelter a fugitive, for my mother is there alone."

"You are right, Rose, I am weary. They have been hunting me unmercifully of late, and sleep were welcome," he murmured more to himself, than to his companion. "I do not

mistrust your parents, Karin," he continued in a louder voice, "yet a secret is safer in the possession of one than of two. You cannot lie. Swear to me that you will betray me to no one, under any circumstances, and I will follow you, wherever you may lead; for, as you have said, I am weary; very weary. To-morrow, ere break of day, I shall be gone."

Karin bowed her head.

"I do not know what may be your reasons; but you shall act as you think fit, for I owe my life to you, and you are an enemy of our enemies. I swear that I will betray your presence to no one. Come."

Under the dark shade of the elms they had reached she took his hand and drew him after her. The rain now pouring down upon the trees deadened the sound of their footsteps. Karin went on silently, deep in thought.

"It is the only safe place," she murmured between her lips, yet not so low but that, overhearing it, he asked her meaning. With hurried answer she told him there was one room in the house, safe from all intrusion at night; she would conduct him there.

The long building they had seen in the distance now lay close before them. It was almost entirely in darkness; only from the ground floor and in one apartment of the upper story were there lights. The first came from a room close to the main entrance, through the window of which could be seen the rough faces of men and maid-servants lighted up by the flickering rays

of an oil lamp. Avoiding the open doorway, Karin drew her companion on one side through what seemed to be a garden lying to the rear of Torpa Castle. Here the east wind howled more furiously, driving the heavy raindrops noisily against the castle walls. For all that, the sound of their approaching footsteps was caught by the quick ears of a gigantic mastiff, who uttered a low growl, stopped by Karin speaking to him in a low voice of command. Then with joyful spring he came whining toward her, growling again as he scented the presence of the stranger.

"Quiet, Björn; he is a Swede, no Dane!" said the girl imperiously, and the mastiff, with one low, short bark, cowered contentedly by his mistress's side.

Feeling along the dark wall, she now pushed back a heavy bolt; then, cautiously fastening the door again on the inside, led her protégé up a dark staircase and through some narrow passages until she reached another door. Taking a key from her pocket she unlocked this. Here Folkung perceived quite another atmosphere—a something which, despite November, came to him like the breath of spring, warm, yet fresh and fragrant as a summer morning. And now, barely had he crossed the threshold, than his guide, letting go his hand, hastily whispered:

"I dare not bring you a light here; it would betray you. Nor must you make the slightest noise, for my mother's sitting-room adjoins this, and she has the most delicate sense of

hearing. Moreover, some of the men or maid-servants might be in there. My father has driven off to a neighbor's house, and only returns to-morrow. As soon as I find opportunity of doing so unperceived, I will bring you some food. Draw the bolt, and do not open the door until you hear it scratched and a voice say: 'Gustavus Vasa.' By the window you will find a bench—" The speaker hesitated a moment. "No," she corrected herself, hurriedly, "you are exhausted. Here to the left you will find a bed. Lie down and recruit yourself, only—only if you would not mind taking off your boots—"

This last request she uttered disconnectedly and in some confusion; but ere Folkung had taken in the sense of her words, he heard the door close behind her.

"Do not forget the bolt," was whispered from outside. But instead of obeying he did the opposite, as, involuntarily flinging the door wide open, he looked after her in the darkness.

"Karin!" he cried, in a low voice. There was no answer, only the shrill whistle of the wind borne in strong current through the dark corridor; the window of the room in which he was being open. The cold draught of air recalled him to the present, and shutting the door he drew the bolt. He made his way to the window, which stood out in gray outline from the surrounding darkness, and looked out, letting the rain beat full in his face. The ground beneath was not visible; but he began to cal-

culate from the number of stairs he had ascended how far down it must be. In this calculation he was disturbed by the joyous barking of the mastiff, which came from the garden below, growing fainter and fainter as it resounded from the front of the house, clearly denoting the direction his mistress had taken.

"Gustavus Vasa," he murmured to himself; "the Rose of Trollhätta said 'Gustavus Vasa' was to be the watchword. She should have said Gustavus Ericsson was a fool, who had lost his head at the touch of a girl's hand."

Noiselessly retreating from the window, he felt his way along the walls of the room. It was strongly built, as a protection from winter rains and cold. Tall, carved cupboards were in the corners, then again wall. No, here his hand met wood again, but this time flat and uncarved, as of a door. At that moment a ray of light shone through a narrow slit, and straight upon it followed the sound of a voice he knew. Folkung stood still, and listened.

"Good-evening, mother," said Karin, in a loud voice.

She to whom she spoke answering, said, "You have been out a long while. It must be dusk." The speaker could not only have weak sight; she must be completely blind.

"It is night, mother," replied the girl; "and stormy. I have been to the Trollhätta, and have rescued the last of summer's butterflies. You know it, the one with red stars on its wings that flies over the Kinnakulle. He attempted

to fly over the Trollhätta and fell in. I saved him, and ever since he has sat tame and secure on my hand. He has not told me that he is grateful, but I feel certain that he knows what he owes to me, and is so; and that were it in his power, he would be ready to lay down his life for me. There, foolish butterfly, settle on to the flowers.”

Gustavus Folkung heard every word through the closed door. A strange thrill passed through him at the singular thanks uttered by Karin, in the name of the butterfly, in such unembarrassed accents; and despite his weariness, lingering there, he heard the old woman sigh, as she replied:

“You are a child and can toy with butterflies. You should have left him where he was; it would have been far better for him. I feel it in my eyes there are evil, stormy days coming upon Sweden; days which will snatch away what has hitherto been saved to her. Read to me from the book, Karin, from which I used to tell you in your childhood. Open it at the twelfth page and read me of the Troubadour who sang the heroic deeds of his forefathers upon his harp, but had no word of praise for his descendants. He was blind, and sat by Trollhätta; then, breaking his harp on the rocks, he sprang into the foaming waters.”

The listener heard the girl cross the room; and began now gently feeling his way back to the window. As he did so, his hand swept over a table and struck against some object which, roll-

ing on to the floor, broke with a loud crash. Hastening onward, he threw himself cautiously upon the bed, of which his guide had told him. In the next room the old woman's voice interrupted the reading to ask:

"Is Björn in your room, Karin? I heard something fall. Let Ingeborg take a light and look."

The maid-servant, sitting silent in a distant corner of the room, rising, took up a lighted candle. But Karin, rising simultaneously with her, said calmly:

"Stay where you are. Björn is outside. I left my window open and the wind has blown something down. I want no light."

Opening the door of her room, she left it wide open behind her, as, with steady step advancing to the window, she noisily shut it. The light of a large, artistically embossed bronze lamp came through the open door, falling direct on to the face of Karin's mother, sitting in a high-backed chair by the table, with the vacant eyes of a blind woman.

Her brow, high and nobly molded as was her daughter's, was deeply furrowed, and crowned with a wealth of white hair. Yet her arms, bare to the elbows, according to the fashion of the time, were still white and rounded. She must be younger than she looked, and when standing would present a noble, imposing appearance. Folkung's eyes could not leave her, as he muttered low:

"You have aged, Brita Stenbock. You were

young and handsome when I climbed upon your knees in Sten Sture's house and tore John of Denmark's chain of honor from off your neck."

He was silent, and turned his head hastily to one side as though impelled by invisible power. Karin's dress passed close by him; he could not control the movement of his hand which went out to seize it and detain her. Whispering her name, he raised the hem of her dress and pressed it to his lips. Drawing back, Karin quietly and surely freed herself, saying laughingly, as she went back into the other room:

"The storm will play no more tricks. Do not be foolish, Storm, and go to rest." And, raising her finger with playful threat, she shut to the door.

Frau Stenbock, lifting her head, exclaimed:

"How childish you are to-night, Karin—"

"The Storm and I have made acquaintance before," she interposed, carelessly. "He is impetuous and audacious; but I need but to stretch out my hand, and, commanding himself, he can be quiet and gentle as a lamb."

Her mother shrugged her shoulders. "Have you been chattering to your gnomes at Trollhätta again, that you talk such childish nonsense? Read on! The storm does not appear to have paid much heed to your behest. My shoulder tells me that it is increasing. I wish your father were at home to-night, or, at any rate, Gustavus—"

Folkung heard no further; fatigue had overcome him. He lay in half-sleep, stormy

thoughts chasing each other through his brain; then Karin's hand seemed to be resting upon his brow, and disentangling themselves, the troubled thoughts were laid to rest. Without, the wind still whistled shrill, and ever and anon Björn would utter a long drawn howl in accompaniment. In his dream the sleeper, pressing the soft pillow to his cheeks, murmured the words spoken by Brita Stenbock: "Is Björn in your room, Karin?" A thrill passed through the dreamer's frame. "Your room, Karin?" he repeated, and drew a deep breath.

Suddenly starting up, he looked around him in amaze. The darkness in which he had fallen asleep had given place to a light bright as day. At least so at first the dazzling light appeared to him. Then he saw that it was shed into his room by the moon breaking through the clouds. But it was not the moon that had awakened him, rather a voice, or a confusion of voices, that met his ear. A noise, seeming in the distance as of far-off thunder approaching nearer, had grown louder and louder; then, stopping abruptly, had altogether ceased.

The secret guest at Torpa Castle hearkened with straining ear. Instead of the previous roll of wheels he now heard the neighing of horses without, and the sound of men's hasty tread upon the entrance steps. The door of the great apartment in which the two female members of the house of Stenbock were sitting was flung open, and a broad-shouldered man of gigantic proportions came hastily in. His hair, fast

turning gray, hung disheveled by the storm upon his rugged forehead, his lips moved vehemently, partly from excitement, partly, it seemed, from pain, as he dragged his disabled foot along, forgetting, in his haste, to support himself upon his sword; his mantle had fallen from his shoulder. Over it appeared the fair head of a young man, whose eyes were peering about uneasily for Karin.

"Father!" she cried, springing up. There was a tone as of unwelcome surprise in her voice, which, however, changed to one of alarm, as she looked at the new-comers.

"What has happened to you, father?"

"To me!" Gustavus Stenbock, clutching at his throat, seemed as if he were wrestling with the words in his endeavor to speak; but the only sound that came was a gasping groan. Words would not follow.

"For Heaven's sake, Gustavus, tell me what has happened?" repeated Karin, turning to the younger man, who had flown to her side.

He, too, was breathless, his clothes dripping, his riding boots incrusting to the knees with mud and slime. Barely some two years older than Karin, it was evident that the dark expression now to be seen in his clear, blue eyes was not habitual to his open countenance. His hands, too, were quivering with excitement; his knees trembling with agitation and exhaustion.

The pause of a second intervened, in which neither made answer, and was broken by the

voice of the mistress of the house. Steadying herself by the table, she had risen, and inclining her head forward, asked: "Who was it that came with Stenbock? Is it Gustavus Rosen?"

"Yes, mother," replied Karin, who, resting her head on the young man's breast, had thrown her arms round his neck; while he, vehemently kissing her eyes and brow with tender impetuosity, murmured wildly, "You are safe—safe!"

Stenbock flung his drenched outer garments on the floor, as with almost angry gesture he exclaimed to the younger man:

"Speak, Rosen. Tell them without reserve, as you told me!"

Gently loosing Karin's arms, Rosen stepped up to Frau Stenbock.

"Sit down, aunt," he said, taking her hand and leading her back to her chair. "I bring you a greeting from Christian of Denmark."

The words, spoken in a strange tone, resounded through the vast apartment. No one spoke. The door by which the two men had entered stood open, showing the faces of the men-servants, who had followed them upstairs, looking eagerly in. Yet a death-like silence reigned—the only sound the mournful howling of Björn without.

Then Frau Stenbock, with sharp, accentuated voice, said:

"Gustavus Rosen, you desire to place yourself under Stenbock's authority; why do you hesitate? The women of Sweden have become men, now that her men conduct themselves like women. What message bring you from Chris-

tian of Denmark? His handshake is treason; his greeting death."

"You say well, Brita," replied the youth, gloomily. Seizing Karin's hand, who had followed him, he held it convulsively in his. "I rode out from Stockholm last night," he continued, with trembling lips. "By the Lake of Wetter I met your father bound for the place whence I came—"

The white-haired lady started up from her seat.

"You had deceived us, Stenbock; you meant to go to Christian of Denmark?" she asked, in a hard voice.

With a muttered oath, Stenbock threw his sword from him. The younger man hastily interposed:

"I had advised it. All the nobles had obeyed the King's command. I feared he would regret it, did he not—"

"All Sweden's nobles are cowards and traitors!" exclaimed the blind woman, impetuously.

"Brita Stenbock you are unjust, and will repent your words," returned the young man, moodily. "They of whom you speak are deaf alike to praise or blame. Since last night Sweden's nobles are no more. The Mälar is red with their blood. Every man who drank with the Danish King in Stockholm has paid for the banquet with his head. By Christian of Denmark's orders the whole Swedish nobility has been beheaded!"

Who had uttered that loud strident laugh which came, as it were, from one corner of the apartment, causing the speaker involuntarily to look round inquiringly. Karin, too, turned her head, while the hand her affianced lover held trembled in his, and her countenance had suddenly grown white.

Whose countenance was not white, after the words Gustavus Rosen had spoken! Even Stenbock's eyes searchingly scanned the faces of those present, and over the heads of the serving men, who, in accordance with ancient Swedish custom on occasion of any unusual occurrence, had crowded into the family sitting-room.

"Is there any Danish traitor among us? Who dared to laugh at Sweden's downfall?" he asked, with lowering brows.

There was no answer; but Karin, stepping forward, said: "It only sounded like a laugh, father; it was the storm."

Rosen looked toward the door leading to Karin's chamber. "It seemed to me to come from thence," he said. "What is it, Ingeborg?"

The maid's eyes, too, were riveted anxiously upon the door. "There was a suspicious noise in there before you came, Herr Rosen. But Fraulein Katharina was courageous and went in."

Drawing his sword the young man had made an involuntary step toward the door, when Karin intercepted him.

"Ingeborg is a timid goose, who believes in ghosts," she said, holding his arm; "believe me, it was but the wind—" and she gently pressed him back.

Brita Stenbock, as though struck by lightning, had fallen back upon her chair, her face sunk in her hands, and had noticed nothing of the foregoing scene. Now rising again without staggering, she asked, with icy expression and in a firm voice:

"Who was beheaded, Gustavus Rosen? Name them to me."

The young man, turning toward her, sheathed his sword in its scabbard. It was evident he was accustomed to obey his aunt's voice.

"Rather ask who escaped, aunt, and it were easy to name them," he answered, "for they are before you. Your lord and myself," he added, after a momentary hesitation.

A strange expression convulsed Frau Stenbock's face. "You were in Stockholm, Rosen? How comes it that you shared not the fate of the Swedish nobles?"

"I escaped it by a lucky chance," returned the young man in a low embarrassed voice. He turned away his head as Karin's eyes rested upon him with shy, hurried glance, yet differently from before.

The mistress of the house repeated his words low between her lips: "By a lucky chance! Rejoice in it, Karin; else were the head of Gustavus Rosen even now lying beside those of Sweden's brave nobles."

The vexed, doubting look which for a moment had been in the young girl's face disappeared, and with a shudder she rested her head on his breast.

Bríta Stenbock resumed with icy voice:

"Is there no one—no one left for Sweden to trust in, save Stenbock and—you?"

The tone in which the last word was uttered was too unmistakable to be answered by silence. Stenbock, who hitherto had remained silent, sunk in gloomy reverie, looking up now, said angrily:

"The time seems to me ill-chosen, Brita, to rake up past errors. Your words are unreasonable, wife. Has Gustavus Rosen done you an ill turn by saving my life? Has he rendered good service to Christian of Denmark in that he hindered him from slaying me with the rest?"

"Mother!" exclaimed Karin, with proud indignation.

But her mother, interrupting her, continued with voice and manner unchanged:

"I have asked you, Rosen, did no one else escape the blood bath?"

The youth must have had reason to control himself, nor was it far to seek in the lovely girl round whom he had thrown his trembling arm; for he replied more calmly than the other speakers:

"I believe Gustavus Ericsson to be the only other who escaped; or, rather, who did not put

in an appearance at Stockholm at all. The fox scented the trap—”

“Speak with due respect of Gustavus Vasa, boy!” thundered the old woman, in such angry tones that Rosen stopped, intimidated. But quickly mastering her sudden vehemence, she slowly resumed:

“Gustavus Ericsson—he was but a child when he taught me what was befitting a Swedish woman. As long as he lives—nothing is lost—perhaps all is won,” she added to herself, in a low voice.

Raising her eyelids, she turned her sightless eyes in the direction whence the young man’s voice had last reached her.

“I do not wish to hurt your feelings, Gustavus Rosen,” she continued. “You have been a child hitherto. Now the hour has come for you to show whether the blood of your fathers, or your mother’s Danish blood, flows in your veins.”

Karin looked joyfully at her beloved.

“Be sure Gustavus has as faithful a Swedish heart as you or I, mother; or as father and Gustavus Vasa,” she said. “But it is growing late; you must all to bed, and to-morrow consider what is best to be done.”

Stenbock shook his head.

“To-morrow may be too late. Christian is swift—as the plague.”

To this Rosen agreed.

“I know a command has gone forth to search the whole country for any of those on the list

of the barber's apprentice, Slagbök, who may have eluded destruction," he said. "At his instigation Archbishop Trolle made out the indictment."

"Heaven's vengeance be upon the traitor—"

Brita Stenbock's passionate adjuration was drowned by a nearer, louder howl from Björn, who now came fiercely barking up the stairs to the room they were in.

"All the secular councilors, two of the bishops, the mayor, and the magistrates of Stockholm were beheaded together," resumed Rosen, excitedly. "All of a sudden the gates were shut, the streets lined with Danish soldiers, who had landed unperceived in the darkness of the night. Those present at the massacre who uttered a sound of lamentation were at once seized upon by the executioners and murdered. Archbishop Trolle besought the King on his knees to carry out the Pope's ban by death—"

Here a loud sound of voices, and the clash of arms from the staircase, cut short the speaker; and Björn, bounding through the open door, sprang whining with eyes aflame to Karin. One of the serving men, following breathless, stammered out:

"Hide yourself, my lord—the Danes have come in search of you—they are in the house already. We are not strong enough to defend it against them."

Stenbock straightened his powerful figure, laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword, as in loud and firm voice he answered:

"Why should I flee from my own house? I am not aware of having committed any crime."

At the same moment the door, which the man had shut behind him in his panic, was flung open and a Danish officer, drawn sword in hand, entered the room, followed by a number of soldiers armed with halberds. So short a time had elapsed between the first news of their coming and their appearance that—with the exception of the master of the house—no one present had had time to control the expression of their surprise at the unexpected event. It had called up a specter-like light into the eyes of Brita Stenbock, who had turned them with a glare of deadly hatred toward the door; Karin's heart beat audibly as she riveted her gaze with feverish anxiety upon the door opposite which led to her room; while Gustavus Rosen with involuntary haste had retreated into the shadow of the dimly-lighted window and was, with burning face, looking out into the night; Ingeborg, the maid, was weeping in her corner, her face covered with her hands; Björn alone kept his flaming eyes fixed upon the intruders, throwing himself down with deep low growl before his young mistress's chamber door; while from time to time he sniffed curiously under it. The Danish captain, after a first searching glance round the room, strode quickly up to the erect figure of the master of the house.

"Herr Gustavus Stenbock?" he curtly asked.

He who was addressed, acquiesced, without change of bearing.

“His majesty, King Christian the Second of Sweden, bids you know that he regrets that his invitation to his capital of Stockholm was not accepted by you. But he is graciously pleased to forget that you have offended him by refusing to comply with your sovereign lord’s wish. In his clemency, therefore, he will visit your refractory conduct with no heavier punishment than by forbidding you, on pain of death, to leave the precincts of your estate until he grants you permission to do so. On pain of death, Herr Gustavus Stenbock! Now I have fulfilled my commission.”

Stenbock breathed heavily. “No one is empowered without the verdict of Senate to condemn a Swedish nobleman to imprisonment,” he replied, firmly.

For all reply the officer carelessly turned from him to the serving men of the house, from whose midst a low muttering had accompanied his words.

“By command of his majesty the King, all disposition to resist his will shall be punished with death. Bind the rebel who murmured in chains, and take him to Stockholm!”

The soldiers straightway seized the servant pointed out by their captain, none of his comrades daring to venture to his assistance. Stenbock’s hand alone convulsively grasped the hilt of his sword. Observing it, the officer, with a sharp look at him, continued:

"It will rejoice his majesty to learn that he possesses a loyal and obedient subject in you, Herr Stenbock. He doubts not but that he may fully trust you not to harbor under your roof any of those traitorous fugitives upon whose heads a price is set, and who roam the kingdom for the purpose of exciting revolt. At the same time, I have command to search every dwelling, without exception, in this neighborhood, and regret that, despite the lateness of the hour, I may not spare you that inconvenience. Begin with the adjoining room—that one there!" he added, turning to his men.

But the self-control of the master of the house was exhausted. Oblivious of his injured foot, with one spring he had thrown himself before the advancing soldiers, and stood, sword in hand, between them and the door.

"Tell Christian of Denmark," he cried, in a loud voice, "that it may be his loss that he cannot reckon my head among those of the other Swedish nobles! He was lord in his castle; I am master in mine. I invite him to come and be my guest; and tell him, moreover, I only regret that he is not here at this very moment, in place of his underling, that I might repay him his hospitality at Stockholm."

The words were spoken with such bitter defiance, and accompanied by such a sharp swish of the heavy sword through the air, that the foremost of the soldiers drew back, alarmed and irresolute at the gray-haired, herculean-looking man who defended the entry. The angry veins

swelled crimson on the forehead of the Danish officer, and he knit his brows threateningly. Signing to the soldiers behind him to lower their halberds, he said, authoritatively:

“Herr Gustavus Stenbock, did I choose to make full use of my powers, this had cost you your life. In the name of King Christian of Sweden, give place!”

The halberds approached in close file, yet Stenbock did not stir. He looked full and calmly at the glistening points as they neared him, then with proud expression of satisfaction he threw his arm round his daughter's neck, who, running to him, crying: “I am with you, father!” stood erect and fearless by his side.

Yet the deadly weapons did not swerve. They were used to blood, and in the fierce wars of conquest and subjection waged by the Danish king against Sweden, it was probably not the first maiden's breast which had been opposed to them. Undazzled by the loveliness of her they threatened, they continued to advance. Not a muscle of the stern captain's face moved as he led them on; it was but the work of a few seconds before the glittering spears must reach the door, before they had pierced through that which opposed itself between them and it.

There was, however, one person in the room who hitherto had remained a passive spectator of what had taken place. Not the mistress of the house. Sitting, as before, at her table, she

seemed uninterested, and, moreover, had for some minutes been sunk in thought. He who had been watching events with rising uneasiness was Gustavus Rosen. His confusion and his endeavors to avert attention from himself, on the entrance of the Danes, had passed unnoticed. With flushed brow he had listened silently to the conversation between Stenbock and the captain in command; then a convulsive thrill had passed through him as he saw Karin's impulsive rush to her father's side. He knew enough of those concerned on either side to be convinced that neither would give in. Unflinchingly the death-threatening halberds were advancing step by step across the intervening space—now they were leveled but a few feet from the breast of the courageous girl.

"Halt!" cried Gustavus Rosen suddenly, as he threw himself between her and the soldiers, who stopped, astonished at his unexpected appearance. The captain, who also had been hitherto unaware of his presence, advanced, drawn sword in hand, as he said roughly:

"Who are you? What is your business?"

The young man gave his name, adding a few words in Danish in a low voice, upon which the officer at once lowered his sword with military salute, and hurriedly ordered his men to shoulder arms and retire; then said respectfully:

"I beg your pardon, Herr Rosen. I was not aware of your presence. May I solicit you to inform his majesty—"

Here Rosen hastily interrupted him. "This

lady is my betrothed. It is her bedchamber in which you have commanded your soldiers to make search. You will understand how Herr Stenbock lost all self-command at such an indignity; nor does it need my word as a nobleman to convince you that no man is concealed in that apartment."

The officer's face had assumed an embarrassed expression.

"Forgive me, Herr Rosen," he stammered, "but my orders—"

Gustavus Rosen frowned, and his hand involuntarily sought his sword hilt. But quickly recovering himself, he said:

"You are right. You must obey orders. At the same time, you will concede me the right which I should be ready to urge before whoever it might be; and both you and Herr Stenbock will allow yourselves to be satisfied if I take upon myself your duties in this particular apartment, in order to carry out the letter of your instructions."

The young man had spoken with unwonted energy and in a defiant voice, and had, moreover, laid such distinct emphasis upon the "whoever," that the officer, with a silent inclination of the head, had given his assent. Retreating a few steps, he gave orders to his men to search the other apartments of the castle. His bearing gave the impression that he was feeling he had gone too far in the insistence to his claim against the young nobleman's expressed wishes, and was seeking to

repair his error by taking up a position so far removed from Karin's chamber that neither ear nor eye should take part in the search there. Stenbock appeared conscious of the great danger to which he had senselessly placed himself and his family; for he now stepped silently aside, leaving the door free, upon whose handle Rosen's hand was laid.

"Forgive me, Karin," said he, turning to her with a smile on his lips; "you know—" But in vain his eyes sought her. Karin was no longer by his side; nor, indeed, in the room at all. In the confusion caused by Rosen's unexpected appearance among the Danish intruders, she had gained the door leading to the hall unperceived. Here, turning to the right, she had breathlessly sped through a series of unlighted passages until she had reached the door by which she had led Gustavus Folkung into her room. Forgetting that she herself had bade him bolt it after her, she began shaking it, then recollecting, she scratched her nails along it, giving the watchword in a low voice—"Gustavus Vasa."

At that instant the door opened, and in the moonlight, brighter now than before, the fugitive stood before her.

"You had given me your word, and Gustavus Vasa waited until you came, Karin," he whispered.

"Quick. Come!" she exclaimed, without taking in the sense of his words. She rushed to the window, and seeing a row of halberds

shining in the moonlight, uttered a low cry. Folkung, who had followed her, threw his arm round her.

"Had they not been there, you would not have found me here now," he whispered, so close to her ear that his lips touched it.

Dragging him along, she rushed back to the dark passage. At the same time the door on the other side opened, and Björn came bounding into the room. Gustavus Rosen, standing on the threshold to allay all suspicion, called to the maids to bring him a light; which was brought him by the still trembling Ingeborg.

"Do not go in alone, Herr Rosen. Take some of the soldiers with you—there is something wrong in there," she implored, nervously.

A happy smile played about the young man's mouth.

"You are right; there is danger here, Ingeborg," he said, with sparkling eyes.

No one gave heed to him in the other apartment. Ingeborg timidly retreated; the hall resounded with the heavy tramp of the Danish soldiers, who, in obedience to their captain's orders, had divided the lights among them supplied by the serving men.

Gustavus Rosen, shading his light with one hand, advanced into the room, looking carefully round. Yet it was evident from the light in his eyes that his eagerness did not proceed from

his self-imposed task, but from a far different feeling.

All at once he stopped thunderstruck. His eyes had fallen upon Björn, who, standing on his hind paws beside Karin's bed, was eagerly sniffing over it. The silken pillows hung partly to the ground, the bed showed unmistakable signs of a heavy pressure, the snow-white sheets were marked and soiled at the foot with wet mud and clay.

He pressed his hand to his brow, from which the cold sweat was running. For a moment the room turned round with him. What Ingeborg had said; the cutting laugh he himself had heard; Karin's words: "Believe me, it is but the wind;" her arm, which had so gently pressed him back from the door; her unaccountable disappearance but now from his side—all rushed with maddening haste to his brain. Then, letting his eyes fall, he mechanically lowered his candle to the ground. Traces of a man's heavy, iron-clamped boots crossed and recrossed each other. Coming originally from the door at the end of the room, they went back to it again. And now Björn, beginning to sniff at them, sprang violently against the door which opened outward. Those who had last passed through had not fastened it securely; it sprang open, and the mastiff tore off along the dark corridors. Mechanically drawing his sword, Rosen dashed after him. With hair wildly falling over his staring eyes and fevered face, he was alone; but above him, and

on all sides, he could hear the heavy footsteps of the Danes, and maddened and confused by the conflicting feelings within him, he cried, gasping: "Here, this way!"

Karin had hurried her fugitive down the staircase by which she had led him up; but instead of opening the door leading out into the garden, had felt along the wall for another.

"I dare not let you out into the garden; the house is surrounded," she whispered. "Go down twelve steps, count them as you go, then turn to the left, and you will find yourself in a straight subterranean passage high enough for you to stand upright in; it will lead you to the Trollhätta, near the spot where you saw me. Some bushes, and a stone which you must roll aside, hide the outlet. Make haste; I hear them coming! May the God of Sweden protect you!"

The hinges of the heavy door, swung back by the girl's strong arm, creaked in the pitch darkness. "Make haste!" she repeated, hurriedly and anxiously, and disengaging herself from the arms of her invisible companion, who was endeavoring to embrace her.

"You do not know what you are doing, Karin," he said, in an impassioned tone. "What would it matter to me, or to Sweden, if, finding me here, they clave me down at your feet! What would it matter to you? But in death I would kiss your feet—"

A gleam of light appeared at the head of the narrow stairs.

"You are raving!" exclaimed Karin, trembling, as with both hands she strove to force him through the protecting doorway. But her strength was as a child's compared with his. Seizing her in his arms, he stammered:

"Give me one kiss, Karin, and I will save myself and Sweden. No second will I ask from you until I have fulfilled my promise. But if you refuse me this one, I stay here and give myself up voluntarily to the Danes, and you will be my murderess!"

Wildly the girl struggled; then suddenly cried joyfully:

"Björn! help, Björn!"

The dog came bounding down the stairs whisking his shaggy tail; but even had he known what he was to prevent, he came too late, for the closely followed fugitive had already pressed his burning lips to those of his mistress, in a wild, passionate kiss. With a cry of terror and indignation, Karin tore herself free, as the approaching light turned the corner, revealing Rosen standing, with furious searching eyes, a few steps above them.

"Thank Heaven! it is my betrothed!" uttered Karin, breathlessly. There was a double sense of relief in the words; for herself as well as for her refugee, from whom she had had reason to seek protection. But very different was the effect of her words upon him.

He staggered to the wall as though struck by lightning; then, springing like a tiger upon her, he cried, seizing her by the shoulder:

“You are the affianced of another man, Karin Stenbock?”

The words were accompanied by the same sharp, cutting laugh which had interrupted Rosen’s recital. The latter, pale as death, had sprung down the intervening stairs at the sound, the light he held in his trembling hand falling full upon Folkung’s face.

“Gustavus—” he screamed. In strong excitement he had torn his sword from its scabbard to cleave Folkung to the ground; but Karin had thrown herself into his arms, and ere he could utter the second name, the fugitive’s hand was on his lips.

“You are a dead man if you speak my name, Gustavus Rosen,” said he, in a tone so authoritative, that the young man instinctively drew back from his flaming eyes. “You have brought me good news. The mower was bound to come to cut down the weeds with bloody scythe ere the seed of the Future could take root. Do not forget Gustavus Folkung’s words! Farewell, Rose of Trollhätta, I will keep my word.”

Startled Rosen looked up, the speaker had disappeared; only the creaking of the heavy, iron-bound door falling back into the lock close to where he was standing betrayed the way the stranger had taken. Now other, louder footsteps stormed along the passage overhead.

Karin took the light from the trembling hands of her betrothed; who, leaning speechless against the wall, had fixed upon her his blue eyes, from which every spark of light had faded. Two heavy tears rolled slowly from them down his cheeks.

"I am so glad you came, my own," said she, thankfully.

Looking wildly at her, he repeated: "You are so glad— Oh, Karin, if only I had not come! If only I had never come, Karin!"

Without understanding him, she seized his hand.

The Danish captain, followed by his men, appeared upon the stairs.

"Did you not call, Herr Rosen?" he asked, courteously.

"It was nothing. Merely Björn scented a wolf stealing round the house to seize a lamb," replied the young man, pointing to the dog, who had set up a low growl at sight of the soldiers.

"We, too, have discovered nothing," returned the officer, retreating. Then turning back, he added, with respectful salutation:

"I beg you to make my apologies to the young lady of the house. As little as to you, did it occur to me to entertain any suspicion in connection with the apartment of your affianced bride. But you are aware, Herr Rosen, that duty—"

"I am aware; and I ought not to have hin-

dered you from carrying out your duty yourself," interrupted the young man, bitterly. "Rather is it for me to apologize to you; and I give you my word that, should it occur again, I will not repeat the offense. But, on the other hand, you might have been satisfied and have spared me the task. I gave you my word as a nobleman that there was no man concealed in my betrothed's chamber."

Here Rosen uttered such a strange laugh that the Danish officer looked at him in amazement; then saluting, retreated.

Karin walked silently along the corridor by the side of her betrothed; her eyes inquiringly searching his face, as though expecting him to speak first.

"You are so strange this evening, Gustavus," she said, at last.

"Strange?" he repeated, stopping abruptly. "It is not I; the world is strange. Give me your hand."

The girl did as he asked.

He held the little hand in his, looking fixedly at it, until the tears again welled into his eyes.

"Two days ago I saw King Christian offer his hand to his guests," said he, slowly; "and his was as calm, as white, as cool as this. Then, throwing his arm round the neck of each, he kissed him—" The youth, impetuously clasping his golden-haired bride to him, kissed her willing lips. "No, it is not the

world that is strange, but the human heart," he continued, in a low voice; "for it will not believe what the eye has seen, and the ear heard. It will only believe what it wishes to believe."

And again clasping the golden head-vehemently to his heart, he strode on.

CHAPTER II.

THE whole land, from the German Ocean to the inhospitable Kjöls of Norbotten, lies under the iron hand of winter. From the summit of the Kinnakulle snow spreads its corpse-like covering around as far as the eye can reach; ice holds the unruly mountain torrents captive. Perhaps in the hollows here and there a stream might be flowing on with low murmur, but unperceived, unheard. Winter reigns around. And winter in Sweden is long; many yet alive will not live to see the return of spring. All save the Trollhätta lies under its stern sway. The Trollhätta owns to no conquering power, neither that of winter nor of Christian of Denmark. Incessantly it roars, as though seeking, with thundering voice of warning, to awake frozen Nature. Incessantly it destroys the icicles hanging like an array of watchmen's swords from its hoary sides, which impotently strive to bridge over and confine it, and dashes them along with its rushing waters.

In all Sweden there is but one man who is like the Trollhätta. His name is Gustavus Ericsson. From the bundle of sticks which figures in his coat-of-arms, in Swedish called

"Vase," the common people have given him the name of Gustavus Vasa. He is the son of a Swedish Senator, and a great-nephew of Sten Sture the elder, the regent, who fell in battle against Christian II. It was in his house that Gustavus had been brought up, and although now but thirty years of age, he had met with many experiences. As a lad, King John of Denmark had seen him in his uncle's house usurp among his playmates the rôle of a Cyrus. The Danish King, overhearing him, had been seized with sudden disquiet, such as Astyages experienced at sight of his unknown grandson. In order to guard against the possibility of the lad's playing the part of Cyrus in later years, he decided to take him with him to Denmark. A determination, however, opposed by Sten Sture. Gustavus Ericsson was sent to the High School in the ancient capital of Upsala, until, civil war again breaking out in Sweden, he fought under the flag of Sten Sture the younger, against the treacherous Archbishop Trolle. In the celebrated battle of Brännkjrka he was standard-bearer. Yet what King John failed to do by open means his successor, Christian, succeeded in accomplishing by cunning. He, promising to come in person to Stockholm to arrange the terms of peace, demanded as hostages for the security of his royal person six of the leaders, among them Gustavus Vasa. In all good faith the regent consented to these conditions; but no sooner had the Danish king received the hostages than he stated that he

would not go to Stockholm, and Gustavus Ericsson found himself a prisoner in Denmark.

For one year he remained as such in the fortress Castle Kallö, in Jutland, where he daily heard of the formidable preparations Denmark was making for the subjection of Sweden. In Jutland no one doubted as to the speedy attainment of the object. In consequence of her quarrels with her seditious archbishop, Sweden was under the papal ban; and Christian's soldiers, in their drinking bouts, were throwing dice for Swedish maidens and feudal tenures.

One of the chronicles of that time says: "Over these indignities Herr Gustavus Ericsson waxed so furiously indignant and sore of heart, that he could neither eat nor drink; nor could he have done so had his prison fare been more appetizing than it was. Nor was his sleep sound and refreshing; nor had he any other thought than how to find opportunity of escape from the imprisonment to which he had been so unjustly subjected."

And the opportunity presented itself. Disguised as a peasant, wisely and cautiously he soon made his way to the frontier of Jutland. To avoid detection he entered the service of a dealer in Flensburg, who drove cattle to Germany, and thus reached Lübeck. Here, recognized and warned to depart, he contrived, by the majesty of his presence, to compel the Senate to grant him a promise of its support

did he succeed in stirring up a revolt against the Danish usurper.

In May of the year 1520, Gustavus Ericsson crossed from Lübeck to Calmar, the only Swedish town, excepting Stockholm, that still resisted the Danes. Stockholm was blockaded by sea and land, and, powerless to reach it, he wandered, in his disguise, through the surrounding districts of Smalard and Südermarmalad.

Then Stockholm surrendered, and Sweden lay at the mercy of Christian, who, with cunning friendliness, not as conqueror, but as Lord Protector of the vanquished kingdom, invited all its nobles to be present at his coronation.

In vain did Gustavus Ericsson endeavor to persuade his friends, in vain did he try to influence his brother-in-law, Joachim Brahe, not to accept the invitation. Early in November of that year the nobles proceeded to Stockholm. Gustavus Ericsson stayed away.

Now winter's snow covered the earth, concealing the blood which had flowed into the Mälar. But the Trollhätta raged in its foamy depths, and as long as it was not bound in the icy yoke, winter was not all-conqueror. As long as Gustavus Vasa could find one loyal Swedish heart which, braving danger, would give him shelter in some rocky cave of the north, Sweden was not in subjection, and sleep fled from the ancient royal bed of the Folkungs, in which Christian of Denmark nightly laid

him down to rest. True, it was a murderous, yelping pack of hounds which hunted the prey from east to west, from north to south, of the broad kingdom. Sometimes here and there the most ferocious of the bloodhounds would track him and keenly follow up the trace he had discovered in the white snow. But it was quickly lost again, and none could tell where it had disappeared. Many a Danish leader tore his beard savagely afterward, when he learned how close he had passed to the fugitive's haunt; and that he had had but to stretch out a hand to secure the golden prize set by King Christian upon the rebel's head. Sometimes the pursuer's hand had even held him, and little wotting who it was, had let him go again, scot free.

Innumerable legends and amusing adventures are still recounted by the country folk of Dalecarlia, as to how Gustavus Vasa, over and over again, deceiving his pursuers, managed to escape them. Once he was lying in the bottom of a wagon covered with straw, and the constables, getting in, prodded it with their pikes, thereby giving him a deep wound in the thigh; which he betrayed by no sound, but the blood flowing through the bottom of the wagon left a red streak in the snow. Seeing which the faithful wagoner cut his horse a deep gash in the fetlock, thus removing all suspicion from the concealed occupant. Another time Ericsson had engaged himself as hind to a peasant, hard by the frontier of Norway, and was standing carelessly by the hearth one day, when a party of

Danish constables, bursting in, questioned him as to Gustavus Vasa's whereabouts. In this critical moment he was saved by the presence of mind of the peasant's wife, who, belaying him smartly with a broom, turned him out of the kitchen, scolding him roundly for a lazy hind, who would do no work, but stood gossiping by the hearth. In forest depths, and among rocky wastes, he passed many a day in cold and hunger—but whichever way Gustavus Vasa took, he left his trace behind.

Winter and Christian of Denmark still kept their iron hand upon Sweden; yet, as one single ray of sunlight has more power to thaw than a whole sharp night has power to freeze, so the Danish pursuers were powerless to exterminate traces of Ericsson's presence. Like a secret dropping of water, the whisper passed from mouth to mouth, and threatening, flashing eyes followed the pursuing soldiers. Many a rusty weapon glittered in dark nights by lamplight as their owners cautiously cleaned and tried them. The seed of that bloody harvest in Stockholm, scattered by the indefatigable sower, Gustavus Ericsson, began to spring up throughout the land.

Springtime had not yet come to Sweden, but a low breeze stirred the firs upon the mountains betokening its approach. The Castle of Torpa lay still buried in deep, winter snow. The frozen surface of the Lake of Wener stretched far away north under its monotonous covering. In the 16th century Sweden possessed few other means

of communication—or, at least, what would be looked upon as such nowadays—than its waterways, and the few there were, were so snowed up that they were impassable even to horsemen.

Even had the road to and from Torpa been open, there was no one to avail himself of it. The ban of the Danish ruler lay upon its inmates keeping all guests away. The only sign of communication with Gustavus Stenbock's house and the outer world was made by the fitful incursions of parties of Danish soldiers, who unexpectedly, from time to time, usually at night, would surround the castle, as on the former occasion, search it from attic to cellar—as then, fruitlessly—and gallop away.

Only in one thing did there seem a change. The lord of the castle and his blind consort, growing weary of their long grudge against Danish rule, had given in to circumstances, and each fresh party of the King's searchers had, to their surprise, to tell of a more friendly reception than the foregoing one. This betokened a change of feeling on the part of one of Denmark's most deadly adversaries which did not pass unnoted at Stockholm. Gustavus Stenbock's standing was great throughout the country; his name would be an important support to a throne acquired at the point of the sword. The King therefore took pains that the tidings were spread wherever his troops went, and learned with joy how a low murmuring against the traitor was gaining ground over

the southern and midland districts of Sweden. He knew that every denunciation of his countrymen must serve to bind Stenbock more closely to him, at the same time that it loosened his hold more and more upon his oppressed countrymen and former brothers-in-arms. And what principally conduced to allay all mistrust of the suspicious King was the presence of Gustavus Rosen and the relationship in which he stood to the House of Stenbock.

Gustavus Rosen was the son of Brita Stenbock's brother, and a Danish noblewoman who had brought her husband large possessions in Denmark. His father dying early, his mother returned with her boy to her own country. He had scarce attained his tenth year when she also died, and having no relative in Denmark who cared to trouble himself about his education, he was transferred to the care of his aunt, Brita Stenbock.

Gustavus Rosen had dearly loved his mother. He looked upon her as the incarnation of everything that was beautiful — as quite another being from the people among whom he now was; and a golden halo was thrown round her memory and that of the home of his boyhood where he had lived with her. In his dreams he would feel the softer breezes of Zealand gently blowing upon him, and would wake with tears in his eyes. In his ears would ring the sweet voice of his mother, who had been wont to sing him to sleep with wondrous old *volkslied* of the praise of Waldemar Seier and the lovely Dag-

mar, while the tops of the green beech-trees, gently waving, murmured in the setting sun. Then Gerda Rosen would kiss him, and smile upon him so tenderly, mysteriously. A shudder would run through the boy when thinking thus.

A stormy gust of wind moaning through the gloomy fir-trees of Trollhätta would abruptly startle him out of his fond dreams. Cold and colorless as a greeting from the eternal ice of the North blew the air over the Lake of Wener. The waters of Trollhätta roared and raged with such angry din that the boy's heart sank more and more. Terrified, he would flee from Nature's wild ravings back to the house; where, instead of his lovely mother, he would be greeted by the stern face of Aunt Brita, who had never forgiven her brother for having married a Dane. Brita Stenbock's voice, at no time soft or lovable, was harder and sterner to her nephew than to any one else. Awed and lonely, the boy would slip off to his dark room in the vast gloomy building and sob until he fell asleep, and friendly dreams would come to him, and every chill, weird, gloomy dream was Sweden, and every warm, bright, smiling one was Denmark.

There was only one bright thing which did not belong to Denmark—only one. The little child with the sunny golden hair, who, sometimes of a night, would steal into his room, sit on the side of his bed, and wipe away the tears from his lashes with her soft little hand.

"Do not cry, Gustavus," she would say, comfortingly. "When I am big I will go to Denmark with you."

Then his face would brighten; and, wide awake, he would tell her over and over again of all he had needs had to keep to himself by day. And as, lost in thought, he would gaze at Karin, it was to him as though her sweet child's face grew larger, lovelier, more expressive, until it grew into his mother's sad, loving face, and Sweden possessed no single thing belonging to it to commend it, not even Karin. Smiling through his tears, the boy would throw his arms round her neck and hide his face on her breast, as he had so often hidden it on his Gerda Rosen's breast; and Karin, becoming sorrowful through sympathy, would entreat, with sobbing voice:

"Do not cry, Gustavus. Indeed I will be your wife and mother, too, and we will go together to Denmark."

Sometimes Brita Stenbock would find the children next morning fast asleep, cheek to cheek. Then a heavy punishment would befall Karin for disobedience in having again tried to console her obstinate Danish cousin, who deserved far worse than to be made to sleep alone. And Stenbock would be called upon to chastise the boy for his crime, in having suffered himself to be thus comforted. But he, having far more weighty thoughts to occupy him in public events, would usually reply:

"Let the children be, Brita, until their time comes."

Perhaps it was not displeasing to him to observe the growing attachment between his daughter and her wealthy cousin. The name of Stenbock was more weighty than the money its estates represented; for, like most property in mid Sweden, it had suffered considerably by the almost incessant wars of the past century. Concerning the education of his nephew, Gustavus Stenbock troubled himself not in the slightest; partly from the influences of the times; may be, partly from his own want of culture. All that it behooved a Swedish nobleman to learn could be best taught by the priest, whose patron was the lord of the castle.

Gentle and dreamy as was Rosen's nature, and averse to associate with other boys of his own age and rank, he was yet an adept at athletic exercises. To Karin's alarm he would ride the wildest horses, and throw the javelin with the most expert of his uncle's serving men. For miles round the Trollhätta there was no rock so steep or dangerous but that he would climb it to gather Karin some rare flower; no matter what the wind, he would swim out in Lake Wener until he was lost to the eyes of the watcher, who would wait long and anxiously until his fair head was once more discernible among the white breakers. Then, reclining on the sunny slope at Karin's feet, he would look mysteriously into her blue eyes and tell of all the wondrous things he had seen out in the dark

expanse, or had heard in its depths. While she would tell him old legends of her country, to which he would listen attentively.

There was a similarity in the two children which seemed almost to do away with difference of sex, a delicate thoughtful tendency which rose above the level and mental capacities of those surrounding them, presenting as great a contrast to them as did their refined exteriors to the wild, rocky wilderness of the Trollhätta. In one respect alone they were unlike each other; and this difference imperceptibly grew day by day. The days had long gone by since Karin, in childish eagerness, had comforted her cousin by telling him she would go with him to Denmark when she was grown up and was his wife. As the flower silently develops its characteristics according to the climate whence it comes, so in that respect was Karin the child of her country. Her eyes would brighten when she spoke of Sweden's victories over Denmark; she hated the usurping nation with child-like fury. Gustavus Rosen, smilingly shaking his head, would answer that men were men, whichever side of the Sound they might happen to be; and that there was no need for them to hate and fight each other; they should love one another, as he loved Karin. Then the little girl, clinching her small fist, would declare never, never could Dane and Swede love one another, they were deadly enemies from their birth. And then throwing her arms round her playfellow's neck, grown so strangely sad looking, she would

draw him to her; and he would tell her once more of the lovely Dagmar, and of how King Waldemar wept at her death, until the tears, too, flowed to her eyes; she never thinking that it was a Danish queen at whose loss she was sobbing.

So the children lived and grew up. The times were wild, and the grown-up people around them gave but little heed to them. They had no one to confide in but each other, and their hearts were as an open book one to another. And strange to say, the more ardently with years patriotism took possession of Karin's heart, the less did she ponder how widely different were Gustavus's feelings. To her he was every bit as faithful a Swede as was young Gustavus Vasa, of whom every one was beginning to speak; and in her dreams she placed as proud hopes on him as did her father and mother on Vasa. On his side, Gustavus Rosen saw in her, more and more, the picture of his lovely mother, who, after her husband's death, had had to flee from his relatives and from Sweden. To him Karin, like her, was a slave in a strange land, and one day he was to be her deliverer, and take her back to her own home—to lovely, sunny, smiling Denmark.

At all events, it never occurred to either to think life possible without the other. The time when first they began to climb the rocks, hand in hand, or to wander through the broad forests together, seemed to them immeasurably long ago; beyond it they had no recollection. And,

in truth, many a year had flown since Gustavus Rosen had first come to Torpa; and from little boy and girl they had grown into youth and maiden. But contrary to custom, their relations to each other remained the same; no stiffness had come between them, no maidenly bashfulness on her side. As of old, they went hand in hand; and yet they did not treat each other as brother and sister. Karin continued to say "when I am your wife, Gustavus;" only the "when I am grown up" did not follow, for she was grown up. Thus in all things they were as formerly; and the two playfellows had merged into lovers without knowing it.

It was the old love, but clad in the garb of life's springtime, and invisibly did spring shower its blossoms upon them; and they drank in its aroma in full draughts and with glistening eyes, without giving one thought whence it came.

Then suddenly came the knowledge. Gustavus Rosen had attained his eighteenth year, and with it his majority, and it was incumbent on him to go across to Zealand to take possession of his property. It was the first parting, and the thought of it, on the evening before his journey, tore aside the dream-like veil in which they had been so long enveloped. He felt that he could not leave her without the right to come back again. Karin was in tears.

The Stenbocks, one and all, thought they knew the lad, and not one—even Karin herself—knew him thoroughly. Perhaps there was one

only who did—Brita Stenbock—and she refused her consent when he openly asked his uncle for Karin's hand. She had to give in; for Stenbock stood to his determination "to let the children do as they liked," having, as we have said, from the first approved their liking for each other.

Now it was Brita's endeavor, at least, to defer Gustavus's journey to Denmark; but even here she was met by her husband's decided opposition. In his opinion, it was not only desirable, but absolutely necessary for both that, having been brought up so entirely together, they should know what it was to be separated. It was to be but a short parting, and their joy at the father's consent overbalanced the thought of it.

In solemn manner, according to old Swedish custom, the betrothal was announced and celebrated; Sweden's greatest nobles were assembled in Castle Torpa; goblets passed round until far into the night, and many an enthusiastic toast for Sweden's weal and of hatred to the Danes resounded. Heated with wine and happiness, Rosen knew not, next morning, what he had said, only that every one had shaken him warmly by the hand, that Karin's face had beamed with delight, and that even Brita Stenbock's stern countenance had smiled approvingly on him.

Hand in hand, as a thousand times before, the affianced couple made their way, next day, to Trollhätta. Their steps grew slower the

nearer they approached the noisy cataract. Behind them followed a groom leading the young man's horse.

"I feel as if we were bidding farewell to our youth," said the maiden, struggling against her tears.

He smiled.

"We have been foolish children; we are but bidding farewell to foolishness—"

"But happy children," she put in, reproachfully.

He looked round dreamily.

"All is as it has been from the beginning of our lives, and my heart beats as then when first your little hand led me here. How many, many years we have sat here and felt the beating of our hearts without understanding them. We thought we knew each other as well as we knew ourselves, and that our most secret thoughts were open to each other, little witting that we were cherishing this great secret within us. Is it the only one, Karin?"

With eyes bedewed with tears she looked assent, and he, vehemently clasping her to his heart, pressed a kiss upon her lips.

"Trollhätta is the third in our bond; it is our oldest friend. Promise me that by it shall be our meeting-place when I come back. I will send you tidings of my coming."

He had sprung upon his horse; Karin held out her hand for a last farewell.

"Come when you will," said she, "I will await you at Trollhätta. No—not when you

will. Come when you feel that my heart can bear our separation no longer. Think how I shall be counting each drop as it falls in Trollhätta; and that each one will be an eternity to Karin."

It was a singular coincidence that upon the very ship which bore Rosen from Göteborg to Copenhagen should be Gustavus Ericsson, then going as hostage for the King's safety from Stockholm to Denmark. Ten years older than Rosen, his finely chiseled, thoughtful, manly face was to the dreamy face of the youth as a noble tree that has stood many a storm to a slender sapling full of promise. The passage was delayed by contrary winds, which soon grew into a gale. Rosen, astonished, saw Gustavus Ericsson, in the height of the storm, climb the rigging of the endangered ship like any experienced sailor, and risk his life more than once to save it. A mixed feeling of liking and of awe arose within him toward the young man whose piercing eye he did not dare to meet when conversation turned upon the great question of the day, then absorbing every mind in the north. Not for the world could he have spoken to him of Karin, and his newly declared love for her. He felt as though the raging waters of Trollhätta could better have understood it, than Gustavus Vasa, with his piercing eyes and hard laugh.

Both alike deceived themselves in one particular. Vasa, like his inexperienced fellow-passenger, expected that a few weeks would see

him back in Sweden, when the treaty of peace was arranged with Sweden.

Of this latter Rosen knew scarce anything. What had it, what had the ancient strife between Denmark and Sweden, to do with his love? The first thing he knew of it was when, landing on Danish territory, he saw a body of Danish soldiers seize his companion, arrest him, and carry him off amid the cheers of the crowd that had gathered. He was informed that his chance acquaintance was the most contumacious rebel in all Sweden; and that it had been unwise clemency on the part of the king to have suffered him to come as prisoner to Jutland, instead of having had him at once beheaded.

Wherever Gustavus Rosen went, he heard the same opinion. Every one was speaking of the coming war, which was to realize the shadowy promise of the Calmarian Union. For the first time, Rosen found himself in the midst of a political movement. No one doubted for an instant but that he was heart and soul a stanch Dane; as on the other side the Sound he had been as unquestionably reckoned to be a stanch Swede. Moreover, here he was a somebody, which he had not been there. He found himself at once acknowledged for what he was—a man of wealth and distinction, whose favor people were anxious to secure. The men treated him with consideration, the women courted him.

His cheeks flushed. For the second time there came over him the feeling—other than that of his childish days, it is true, and per-

haps this time having its root in vanity, yet a pardonable vanity at eighteen — that Denmark was his home.

Still, pleasurably as the thought presented itself, it did not take possession of him. His thought was incessantly of Karin; her image it was which lent to everything the sunny fascination that encircled him; from out the golden ground of every goblet he raised to his lips, looked, as though in a mirror, microscopically small but distinct, her sweet face, framed in the solitary mountain grandeur of the Trollhätta. He hastened from Copenhagen to his estates in the interior of Zealand. There he found much needing investigation and reconstruction. Dishonest representatives had for years been playing the master; purposely disordering the accounts against the day of reckoning. Despite his youth and tendency to dreaming, Gustavus Rosen had keen intelligence, and he hated deceit, which he found to be rampant. So, it became necessary to make a longer stay than he had at first intended, to bring thorough order into his affairs; and, meanwhile, he pleased himself by beautifying his estate, laying it out to the best advantage, and introducing the improvements he knew Karin loved best. He even had a deep bed sunk to a merry running stream, which, made to fall over a sheer precipice, was to be to her a recollection of Trollhätta.

At last came the final day of his exile, and on his fleetest horse he galloped back to Copen-

hagen. There he was met by the startling intelligence that war was on the point of breaking out with Sweden; and that none were allowed to leave Denmark.

Gustavus Rosen left no stone unturned to get back to Sweden. He applied to the most influential personages for permission. In vain. With a shrug of the shoulders, they merely referred him to the King's uncompromising proclamation, telling him that any attempt on his part to evade it would inevitably result in the confiscation of his property, if not of a still severer forfeit.

Undismayed, he made the attempt. The coast of Sweden, bathed in the golden hues of the setting sun, lay so near, so enticingly before him. He seemed to hear the roar of Trollhätta, to feel Karin's blue, child-like eyes fixed upon him. By dint of promising a heavy bribe he induced a fisherman to take him across the Sound at midnight. Wellnigh arrived at the desired goal, he fell into the hands of a Danish cruiser, and was taken back prisoner to Copenhagen, suspected of being a spy conveying information of the Danish war proceedings to Sweden. Thus he was detained for weeks without the authorities even troubling to find out his name. Imprisoned in a dark tower, with scarce enough food to keep him alive, it was some time before he succeeded in getting a petition for an audience conveyed to the hands of the King. No sooner had he done so, however, than the bolts and bars of his prison flew

open. Treated with greatest deference, he was begged to forgive the unfortunate mistake under which he had been imprisoned; and a letter from the King was presented to him, commanding him to repair, next day, to the royal castle.

King Christian the Second of Denmark was one of the most extraordinary contradictions ever known among princes. His dissolute habits had shown themselves at a remarkably early age in his love for the beautiful Dyveke of Amsterdam, whom he met in Bergen when Stadtholder of Norway, and with whom he fell in love so madly and passionately that he defied his father's anger and endured the hardest punishments from him, refusing to give her up. His nature was despotic as that of any Oriental ruler. Whatever opposed itself to him he followed up with might and cunning until he had crushed it. He hated the nobles of Denmark, as of Norway, because they refused to bow like reeds beneath his hand. Revengeful, malignant and cruel to a degree, he was, at the same time, courageous and remarkably intelligent. The burghers, delighted to see him humble the nobles who trod them under their feet, gladly gave allegiance to him. They feared him more than they loved him; but reckoned wisely that it was better to have one arbitrary ruler over them who needed their support than the many who, combining together, were strong enough in themselves to take no account of the middle classes. And, in fact, when, in pursuance of

his far-reaching policy, as often happened, he mixed among the lower orders, there was not a man in Denmark who appeared possessed of such taking amiability, honest cordiality or fascinating exterior than was Christian the Second. The look of his piercing eyes, his haughty mien were then entirely changed. No one had greater command over his features; no one a more terrible facility for concealing his thoughts. The smile upon his lips could be as unconstrained whether he took the goblet from a burgher's hand to drink his health, dropping in it the while a gold piece as a token, or whether he were handing some powerful noble the cup he had caused to be filled with deadly poison.

One bond, however, drew the whole nation to him.

King Christian was a Dane, every inch of him, who never swerved for an instant from carrying out Denmark's ancient tradition of the subjection of the neighboring kingdom of Sweden. The little island shared its ruler's wrath that its powers should be so restricted, his majesty so hemmed in. A war, which should result in complete mastery over Sweden, called even those who most dreaded and detested the king to his standard.

Soon after he ascended the throne, Christian had contracted a marriage with Isabella of Spain, sister of Charles the Fifth, Emperor of Germany; and it is proof that, despite the odium which attaches to his memory, there was

something latent in him capable of better development, that through all the misery and wretchedness of the later years of his life she never left him, but remained stanchly by his side until her death. The queen of his heart was still, however, the beautiful Dyveke, who was made to flaunt the queen by living openly in one wing of the palace. His policy was guided by his mistress's crafty mother, *çi-devant* hostess of the inn at Bergen, and his malicious confessor, the former barber's apprentice, Slaghök. It was these two who principally led him to pursue his ever-increasing system of severe and imprudent measures toward the nobles. They were his evil stars. His good star, despite all, the only one capable of shedding one reflected ray of sunshine into Christian's benighted soul, was that singular combination of loveliness, sadness and joyousness, the "dove" of Amsterdam. Destitute of envy or ambition, she loved in him the man, not the king; ever striving, with wise, gentle hand, to free him from the net of ruinous policy which her wily mother, Frau Sigbritt, had cast around him. Had the wise, gentle dove lived longer, the pages of history would probably not have been stained with the bloody episode of Stockholm.

But Dyveke died. To this day a mystery envelops her death, whether a natural one, or a violent one inflicted by the hands of some enemy. The common people, who loved her, accused the nobles of having poisoned her. And Christian, stung to madness by her death,

lent the accusation willing ear. The weightiest suspicions were directed against one Torbon Oxe, a near relative of the Lord High Chamberlain of the palace. Thrown into prison, he confessed upon the rack that he had loved Dyveke before the King had known her. Wild with rage, Christian had him beheaded and burned; and is said to have scattered the ashes to the winds with his own hands. Then he began a bloody persecution of the nobles, wherever he suspected connivance with Dyveke's death. Numberless heads fell under the executioner's ax; old Sigbritt ever stirring up afresh his vengeance. At length, even the people beginning to murmur at the wholesale extinction of their nobles' families, she dexterously turned the King's wrath upon Sweden and its aristocrats. The bloody onslaught at Stockholm had been decided upon for years before it could be carried out.

Strange that two men of such utterly diverse character and intention should yet have met in the one thought; Christian the Second and Gustavus Ericsson. The first determined to destroy the nobles, in order to subjugate Sweden; the second, greatly as he abhorred the bloody crime of the Danish tyrant, recognized that the ardently longed-for independence of his fatherland was only to be achieved by the absolute downfall of the power of the Swedish magnates, who jealously held back, and were themselves the first to fight against any one who endeavored to raise up Sweden.

Gustavus Vasa knew that the massacre of the nobles in Stockholm was not alone the signal, but the very condition of Sweden's freedom from Danish tyranny.

And Christian the Second, from the time of Dyveke's death, had grown more morose, merciless, and secret than ever. His good star had gone out. Gloomily brooding, he sat alone in his palace, drawing up, from day to day, more and more ghastly, blood-curdling plans of action.

In this mood Gustavus Rosen's petition for release from his imprisonment found him. Christian possessed many attributes of a great statesman. He knew the personal affairs of every one of his subjects of any note, down to the most trivial particulars, and could tell at a glance how and where to gain his advantage. Affably he invited the youth to give him the short history of his life hitherto; listened with winning condescension to every detail; smiled, with his own charm of manner, when Rosen spoke of Karin Stenbock's exceeding loveliness. Before he had finished, the dissonance in the youth's nature lay clearly open before him, and he had grasped the advantage to be derived from it. Refusing his consent to Rosen's immediate return to Sweden, he yet dismissed him with every sign of royal favor; promising him that, in a few weeks, he should cross the Sound in the royal retinue, and giving him his kingly word that, should Frau Brita Stenbock have used the period of his unavoid-

able detention to his disadvantage, he, the king himself, would secure his marriage with her lovely daughter. For one short second there was a curious gleam in Christian's eyes during this portion of their conference; then, to the astonishment of his suite in attendance, himself conducting the young man to the door of the apartment in which the audience had taken place, he shook hands with him, dismissing him with gracious gesture.

Gustavus Rosen would not have been only nineteen, nor have been brought up under Brita Stenbock's rigid rule, had he not from that hour been under the fascination of the King of Denmark. His spirit was even more noble than the name he bore; he could not have wronged the lowest serf. Was not the King of like mind?

Christian's acts of vengeance had been committed before his time. He had barely even heard of them; and, in the universal enthusiasm over the coming war with Sweden, even their memory had wellnigh escaped the minds of the people about him. There was but a shadowy passing feeling within him at times that Karin was a Swede; but then what mattered the accident of race between them; how could it interfere with their love? Even with him the accident of birth had made him a Swede, yet the return of the feelings of his boyhood certified to him that Denmark was his country; and so it would become hers, when once she learned to know it, as it had been his

own dear mother's, and that of the lovely Queen Dagmar. For so their sweet images ever blended together in his heart.

Withal he had perforce to submit in one matter, and that sorely against his will. Weeks grew into months, and yet only in his dreams was the narrow strip of water crossed that separated him from his love; and powerless as he was to realize his dreams, so did he find himself equally powerless to transmit any message to her to still her fears at his lengthened absence. Then, at last, King Christian and his army began to advance; and Gustavus Rosen received command to keep in the King's vicinity. He had never taken up arms against the land of his fathers, nor did the crafty king in words express any wish that he should do so. He merely had him kept in camp, where every mark of respectful distinction was paid him. Still, Gustavus felt that he was watched on all sides, and that every attempt on his part to reach Castle Torpa without Christian's consent would fail, as had done his attempt to cross the Sound. Uninterested, vainly striving to battle with his vehement impatience, he accompanied the army; was witness to the bloody battle of Bogesund, in which the brave Sten Sture fell and Sweden became a prey to the Danish conqueror; yet did not realize the full meaning of that ill-fated day.

That evening, in the moonlight, the King came across him, leaning mute and despairing against the trunk of a tree. Christian was clad

cap-a-pie in iron armor. His impetuosity had largely helped to carry the day. Slapping the dreamer on the shoulder, he exclaimed, with somber irony:

“If I were the beloved of the Pose of Trollhätta I would even now saddle my steed and be off to her, Gustavus Rosen. Greet her, and also Brita Stenbock, her mother, from me. If she be not satisfied with her son-in-law, bring her to me, in November, to my capital of Stockholm. I shall know a remedy. You I expect there on the first of November. You understand me?”

Five minutes later Rosen was in the saddle, riding hard all night until dawn dispelled the darkness. Then, allowing himself a few hours' rest, more for sake of his horse than himself, he dispatched a messenger, according to agreement, to Torpa, to inform Karin, and her only, of the time of his coming. It was to be early in the afternoon, and punctually he timed his arrival. Now he caught sight of the tall elms that shaded the castle and that used to make his room so dark and gloomy. Leaving them to the right, he spurred his horse on. Another light was shed upon them now than formerly; his heart no longer beat timidly at sight of them in dread of his aunt's stern voice.

Gustavus Rosen smiled to himself as he thought how things had changed; the while his heart was beating perhaps more violently, more anxiously, more nervously than ever. Ever nearer roared the Falls of Trollhätta,

sending him its thunder of welcome. He felt as though it were but yesterday that he had ridden away—as though it were but a minute ago, and that he had but to turn and see Karin standing on the very same spot where she had kissed him for the last time, as she said:

“My heart will be counting each drop of Trollhätta, and each one will be an eternity to me—”

At that moment had any one, calling out “Bogesund” to him, asked him which side won the battle, he would have paid no heed, would hardly have known.

How familiar was every step of the way to him! That corner turned, a minute longer—half a minute—and he would hold her in his arms.

At last! Here was the spot, and, with glowing face, he sprang from the saddle. His eyes, with feverish haste, scanned the place. Could he have been mistaken? Had memory deceived him, and was it some other part when Karin, struggling with her tears, had said:

“Come when you will, I will be waiting by Trollhätta?”

No. Impossible! Every fir-tree, every stone, indelibly fixed in his memory, was there. She must be here—hidden, perhaps, to try his patience; and he hastened down the slope, looking behind every rock, searching round every bush. Thus they had played as children, and he knew every hiding-place from out which, as he came near, the glistening, golden hair had so often betrayed her.

In vain! He had searched everywhere; and now began calling her, loudly, imploringly, by name. The roar of the cataract deadened the call: "Karin—Karin!" Gradually it struck him that the messenger must have given her a wrong time for his coming—she was not expecting him yet; and he ascended the hill from whence he could look over to Torpa, ready, as soon as he perceived her, to conceal himself and steal back to await her at the dear trysting place, so rich in memories to them.

Gustavus Rosen waited long. He waited until dusk set in and flocks of crows in noisy numbers swept croaking over the Trollhätta, and, shadowy, disappeared in the uncertain light. Then, silently mounting his horse, he rode back to Torpa with beating heart, a thousand thoughts surging in his brain. Had his messenger not reached? Could Karin—and here his heart beat still more anxiously—could Karin be ill, and so prevented? Had Brita Stenbock—?

He spurred his horse until the noble creature, unaccustomed to such cruel treatment, flew like an arrow over the ground. In a few minutes he had reached the castle, and, springing from his horse, had flown up the terrace steps. A maid met him:

"Where is Karin?" he asked, breathlessly. "Is she ill?"

Wonderingly, she answered: "No, our young lady is quite well, and is waiting anxiously for you, sir."

Breathing again, he tore open the door of the

sitting-room and rushed in. Karin came hurriedly toward him.

"Gustavus, Gustavus!" she cried, excitedly. "Is it true? Oh, say no! Is it true that Sten Sture has fallen?"

Her cheeks were burning, her wide-open eyes were fixed anxiously upon his face.

"Karin," stammered he, taking her hand, "did you not know that I was coming? Where were you? Since noon I have awaited you at Trollhätta!"

She, looking about her as if waking, fell, weeping impetuously, upon his neck.

"Oh, Gustavus, all is lost!" she moaned.

He, unthinking, made answer: "All is won. Are we not together again?" and covered her mouth with kisses.

She, struggling herself free from him, looked reproachfully at him.

"Six hours you have been here, yet only now bring us the news?"

"Six hours I was waiting there for you. Did you not receive my message?" he returned, perplexed.

"Is this a time to be thinking of childish things?" she asked, almost passionately. "How was I to imagine that you would ride past Torpa?" she continued more gently.

"You had promised. Were the whole world coming to an end I would have gone, Karin," he said, in a low voice. "Has our love for each other become child's play, Karin?" His voice broke into sobs.

Karin, bending hurriedly toward him, kissed away the tears welling up to his eyes.

"Poor Gustavus," said she, tenderly. "I forgot what your suffering must have been in the Danish tyrant's imprisonment."

Of course, he had been imprisoned, and in the excitement and confusion of the battle of Bogesund had effected his escape! That was the general belief; nor did Rosen's silence on the subject lead them to doubt it. He was as if dazed. The excited talk of the stirring events taking place went on about him without his being able to trace their connection. Sometimes he would try to pull himself together, to enter into what was passing around him; then again he would quickly lose the thread, his sole sensation that of unspeakable sadness and weariness. All he saw was that Karin's cheeks would grow pale, then glow with feverish excitement, as on the day of his return. In her changes of color, in the expression of her eyes, did he read what was going on in the outer world. She had grown vehement, passionate, as she had never been before. Passionate in her movements when any message from Calmar or Stockholm, still standing out against the Danes, arrived; passionate, too, in her love, when she embraced her lover and her lips sought his for a kiss.

She was no longer the gentle, consoling playmate of his recollection; she was the lovely Maid of the North, such as the fancy of ancient bards had portrayed Freya; as the poets of

their own times had embodied the Protecting Goddess of Sweden. And in that wondrous semblance lived two souls, looking out into the world with their deep, far-seeing eyes. The one, with eyes yearning and radiant, unfathomable as the blue of the heavens, mysterious as a summer noon, loved Gustavus Rosen. The other, gazing—past her lover's woe-struck face—with restless, trembling look into the far distance, fixed upon an invisible goal, to which she was drawn by an irresistible, irrefutable force, a force which drowned all voices near her, as did the loud, falling waters of Trollhätta.

Karin Stenbock's first question was not had her father been wounded at Bogesund; but had Sten Sture fallen.

That day, which had sealed the fate of Sweden, had witnessed a terrible event, fated to have sad consequences for Torpa, but which, sad as they were, were scarce heeded in those stirring events of history where none could stop to think of individual interests. The messenger who had announced the coming of Gustavus had also brought the first tidings to Torpa of the result of the battle; on hearing which, Brita Stenbock had rushed forth, distracted, no one knew whither. Through storm and rain she had wandered on, in the direction of Bogesund. She was found some seventy miles from Torpa, lying unconscious on the ground, wet to the skin, her clothes ragged and torn. Thus she was brought home. For weeks she lay uncon-

scious, between life and death. When consciousness at last returned she was found to be stone blind. What mattered the loss of a woman's sight compared with the fate of Sweden? Karin, weeping at her mother's bedside, would be called away to receive a message from Stockholm. The weight of passing events had steadied the girl beyond her years. Many a separate thread of opposition to the conquering force, scattered among rock and lake, ran through her hands. Her father was taking part in the defense of Stockholm, and hardly a day passed on which some secret message or commission did not reach his wife at Torpa, whose place had now to be filled by her daughter, scarce eighteen years of age. Thus Brita Stenbock must often in her loneliness and blindness have been confided to the care of one of the maids, had there not been some one at Torpa ready to sit by her bedside and divine her every wish—Gustavus Rosen.

He had never loved his aunt; yet the sight of her, blind and helpless as she now was, made on no one else so deep an impression, not even on Karin. Brita Stenbock was a hard woman. She made no complaints, no lamentations over her lost sight; but equally little did she thank the young man who watched by her for days and nights, and took so patiently her imperious moods, and the sharp words with which she would overwhelm him when he was able to give no tidings of affairs in Stockholm, and was compelled to refer to Karin. To Gustavus

Rosen her loss of sight was more painful than the loss of Sweden's freedom; more painful even than to herself. To him she was no longer the stern, harsh-tempered aunt to whose will he had perforce to yield; but Karin's mother—whose loveliness she was no longer able to safeguard. But if she gave him no thanks for his tender care and unwearying solicitude, Karin felt it twofold; and he met many a radiant, grateful glance from her blue eyes, as, lovingly pressing his head between her two hands, she would whisper:

“How good you are, Gustavus.”

That, however, was only when no bad news had come from the seat of war. At such times Karin had neither eyes nor ears for her betrothed; her eyes then were blind as her mother's to all around her. As if possessed by some mysterious power, she would stand, like that ancient bard who, tradition tells, stood on the brink of Trollhätta, and was drawn on by its demoniac power until he sprang unresisting into its foaming gulf. How often in her childhood's days had she stood beside Trollhätta, looking down on to the very place marked out by tradition as where it had occurred, without being able to understand the legend. One evening in the twilight, sitting with Rosen, happy, and only thinking of their love, as of old, he smilingly told her that she reminded him sometimes of that ancient bard, and likened the troubles of their fatherland to the rushing Falls of Trollhätta tearing her from his embrace. But, he added, he could afford to

laugh, because even from those dark depths he was ever able to raise her in his arms again.

"What is the matter, Karin?" he exclaimed in sudden fear.

He had felt how she had shuddered as he spoke, and had pressed more closely to him, as she hid her head upon his breast. Looking up at him with a strange expression, she kissed him, as she softly said:

"Poor Gustavus, do not grow weary. Oh, if you were to grow weary and the current to seize me so that it was too late, and you were unable to raise me any more—"

She shuddered once more, as she fell back into his arms again.

"Do not forsake your Karin," she whispered. "I love you so dearly—so dearly—"

Then came the day of the fall of Stockholm.

The Danish navy had been insuperable; the besieged, taking flight inland, scattered to north and south. Gustavus Stenbock, too, returned to Torpa. Sweden was lost; it behooved every man to look to his own safety.

Dark days lay over Sweden; perhaps, more than all, over Torpa; although the summer of 1520 was one of exceptional length and beauty, even lasting into late autumn. Still, the expected retribution came not. The new King seemed to treat all his subjects with like paternal affection and clemency; to remember their past resistance to his will and arms no longer; to have forgiven and forgotten all. Couched in

most conciliatory terms, he issued invitations to the whole nobility of the land, without distinction as to whether they had fought for or against him, to attend his solemn coronation at the commencement of November in Stockholm.

To Gustavus Rosen alone those dark days were happy ones.

Karin seemed as though, after some long, delirious illness, to have come back again to life, and spirits, and love. Leaning upon her betrothed's arm, she wandered once more over mountains and through forests, as when they were children. She smiled once more, and his heart grew light and free from care. His world was in her eyes, from which all trace of anxious pre-occupation had departed; and she seemed never to have had room in her heart for aught else than the old steadfast, newly discovered, idealized love of their childhood's days. Now he breathed impassioned words to her, and she, blushing and happy beyond words, would nestle in his arms. Even Gustavus Stenbock, despite the dark days without, rejoiced in the young people's happiness.

Brita Stenbock alone remained as icy toward Rosen as heretofore, constantly finding new excuses to retard the fixing of her daughter's wedding-day. At length, even she could find no more plausible reasons for the postponement, and the wedding was irrevocably fixed for December, and the happy couple began secretly counting the days to the fulfillment of their hopes.

Then came to Gustavus Stenbock the invitation—to Rosen the command—to attend King Christian's coronation in Stockholm.

The parting was bitter, more tearful on Karin's part than the former one had been. It could but be short, yet so they had thought on the previous occasion. It was imperative; Stenbock himself compelling his future son-in-law to go, foreseeing the most serious consequences to him if he failed to appear. He himself was prevented attending the royal summons by a wound in the knee, which made it impossible for him to undertake the difficult journey in winter. He, as little as the other invited guests, with the exception of Gustavus Ericsson, had any thought of danger; but he held it to be dishonorable to attend the court of the conqueror, against whom he had so recently fought. The very day on which Karin, without the aid of Folkung's strong arm, would have been sucked into the whirlpool of the Trollhätta, Stenbock had changed his mind. Every one of the nobles had obeyed the King's command, and, principally on his children's account, he feared, uselessly, to arouse the royal anger against them by his absence. Without telling his change of plan to his wife—of whose violent opposition he was certain—he started for Stockholm.

By Lake Wetter he came upon Rosen returning from the capital. In greatest agitation, horrified to the last degree at the bloody deed of which he had been witness, Rosen rode back

with him to Torpa. His indignation excited him to more violent speech than he had ever before uttered; seeming as though he felt the full force of the treachery and crime that had been perpetrated upon Sweden. And maybe he was on the road to do so; maybe an inner voice was telling him that every honest heart must tear itself from fair childish dreams when a whole country—a nation, his Denmark—could glory in the awful treachery of a savage king against hundreds of the noblest of another race. Perhaps the youth was never more disposed than that night to forget Gerda Rosen and the lovely Queen Dagmar; the beech woods of Zealand and the sunny dreams of his childhood's days; and to understand that other soul, those other eyes of Karin Stenbock.

CHAPTER III.

Now all lay dead and ice-bound, from the Baltic to the Kjöls of the North. So sunless was it that when that luminary appeared, to disappear as quickly as it came, it was joyless, colorless, spiritless. Brita Stenbock was the best off. She could not see it; but she heard the more acutely, and her ear told what her eye failed to see.

Gustavus Rosen had not forgotten his mother and the lovely Dagmar since that night. For one short instant he had stood, as it were, upon a tottering cliff, from whence the least breath of wind must have cast him into the depths. The storm which had burst over Castle Torpa had dragged him back. The recollection of the bloody massacre he had witnessed in Stockholm had been wiped from his memory.

He did not tell himself so; he did not think about it; yet it was so. Ever since—to prevent Karin's chamber from being desecrated by the entrance of the search party—he, braving the wrath of the King and the halberds of his soldiers, with a smile had stood on the threshold he had not passed for years, his heart had seemed stunned within him. A dumb, intolerable anguish filled his breast. He cherished no

doubt of his beloved; in his inmost soul he reproached her with no breach of faith; but that she could have acted thus, that it could have been possible to her secretly to have put herself in a position which must invest her pure image with the breath of suspicion, was, to him unspeakably painful. More bitterly than ever did he feel that there was a something, to him, an impalpable shadow, which had grown to gigantic proportions in Karin's soul, threatening to separate them still further and further.

As little as he understood this something thus threatening to come between them, as little did Karin, in her unsuspecting innocence, understand her lover's grief at the circumstance of which he had been the accidental witness. What she had done appeared to her so natural; necessity had so imperatively demanded it of her, that she must have acted thus even had she been aware of the suspicion which it would engender. But she was but eighteen, her soul as pure as the snowy foam of the Trollhätta; and all frankly, now that she was no longer bound to silence, did she give her lover the particulars of the events of the evening of his home-coming. Gustavus Folkung had not been the first fugitive who had sought shelter in Castle Torpa; but on other occasions the fugitives had sought the protection of the lord of the castle.

It was the first time that Karin had been placed in a position necessitating discretion and judgment. Without *arrière pensée* Karin told how never a fugitive had made such impression

upon her as had this one; it had almost seemed as though he commanded and she must obey.

Rosen turned pale as she spoke. For an instant he felt he must vehemently break into her speech to ease his oppressed heart; but, commanding himself, he listened in silence as Karin, continuing, told him of her agony when he first proposed to look into her room, she having given Folkung her promise to betray him to no one; and how at last, feeling that, come what might, she must dare it, she had hurried through the midst of the Danish soldiers to reach the other door of her room.

"For I was so afraid that in your surprise, or from want of thought, you might betray his presence, Gustavus, before I could warn you. We did hear you call after us, in the dark passage, 'This way—this way!' Why did you do that?"

Her blue eyes looked up questioningly at him with such expression of unspeakable innocence. His face crimsoned like that of a criminal; in confusion, seizing both her hands and covering them with kisses, he stammered:

"Forgive me, Karin. I was in such excitement from all that had happened in Stockholm, and was happening here. I thought—I fancied—I might put them on a wrong scent—"

Shaking her head, her eyes still raised to his, she said:

"How apt you men, who call yourselves the stronger sex, are to lose your heads at such times, and to do the most silly things; for, in-

stead of putting the Danes on the wrong scent, you were bringing them direct upon us. A minute more and it would have been too late." She was silent for a moment in thought. "Why did you come along that passage at all?" she asked.

The crimson on the young man's face changed its hue, his eyes flashed with somber light.

"Your room, your bed, gave me the clew, Karin. When I recall the moment I found that clew—" with difficulty he compelled himself to stop, and turned away his head.

"Then you did know that I was secreting some one," she returned, reproachfully, "and should have been doubly careful, for your thoughtlessness might have exposed me to gravest suspicion."

Involuntarily Gustavus Rosen looked once more full into his betrothed's eyes as she said these words. Their expression was as reproachful as had been her voice; but seeing his look of pain, it gave place so instantly to the accustomed expression of implicit, happy love, that, staggered, conquered by it, he fell at her feet, stammering:

"Oh, forgive me, Karin—forgive me!"

She knew not what she must forgive him. A whole chasm lay between the suspicion of which she had spoken, to which his thoughtlessness might have exposed her, and between that suspicion for which his silent tears, as they fell upon her hand, pleaded forgiveness.

She merely repeated, as upon that evening: "You are so strange, Gustavus—"

She should have said: "Jealousy is so strange."

That two-headed monster whose hue is ever changing from joy to despair, from guilt to repentance; which, like an evil spirit, once conjured up from the darkness, is never more to be exorcised; which, like a fever, ever comes back to its prey, dazzling his sight, darkening his brain, convulsing and throwing him prostrate to the ground. Jealousy can cause the flutter of a leaf to chase away its victim's sleep, leaving him tortured with shadows, which, in his saner moments, he knows to be but the creation of his arch enemy, but which now wrestles and battles with him, and conquers him; to which, when the hour of temptation again recurs, he will fall as ready a victim.

Folkung's name never again crossed Rosen's lips; but it was indelibly carved upon his heart. December was long past, and with it the day fixed for the wedding, without any one bringing it to mind. The clouds hung too heavily over Sweden to allow of any opposition to Brita Stenbock's curt remark that this was no time for rejoicings.

Winter went its monotonous way at Castle Torpa. No human footprint on the deep snow showed any communication between it and the outer world; the croaking of the ravens were the only living sounds without the walls of the great, solitary building. The severe, long-protracted

frost tamed even them into frequenting the neighborhood of the kitchen, to peck the crumbs almost from the maids' hands; or to wait for hours outside her window, until Karin, compassionating their starving condition, would scatter food to them like pigeons. Among them were small, graceful jackdaws, with their shining black feathers, which, trustful and fearless, would fly upon her shoulders, and peck the seeds from her hands. They it was who must have brought her tidings from the world without; for she always knew exactly what was taking place, although no human being came to the house. She knew all about the rising among the Dalecarlians; the "vare men," into whose rugged wastes Gustavus Vasa had fled. As accurately, too, did she know the list of those who, having escaped the bloody massacre of Stockholm, had been in hiding throughout the length and breadth of Sweden, and who, tracked by Christian's soldiers, had subsequently been dragged to execution. Even children had not been spared. In Jöuköping, a noble of the house of Ribbing, and his two little sons, had been beheaded in presence of the King. The eldest of them was eight years old, and as the ax did its ghastly work, his blood besprinkled the dress of his little five-year-old brother, who, frightened, said, anxiously: "Oh, Mr. Executioner, please do not soil my clothes, or mamma will scold me!" And the executioner, throwing down his ax, refused to kill the little fellow. But King Christian, calling up another,

ordered both the child and the compassionate executioner to be then and there beheaded.

All these things were known in Torpa, yet Brita Stenbock made no comment; no expression of indignation crossed her lips. It was an evident fact, become more apparent day by day, that the house of Stenbock had made peace with the newly-crowned King of Sweden. It was a prudent step—most prudent; for among the few remaining noble families it took a prominent position, and might, by favor of the ruler, aspire to the highest offices under him. Angry and contemptuous were the secret curses that went from mouth to mouth at their treachery to the fatherland; nay, it was even whispered that, upon Christian's approaching return to Denmark, Stenbock had already been chosen by him as Stadtholder of Sweden. There were still many who did not believe it, and vehemently contested it; but even they were abruptly silenced when the news spread that the King, on his journey, would, by Stenbock's invitation, visit Castle Torpa, and by his presence add brilliancy to the marriage of Karin Stenbock with Gustavus Rosen.

The report was a true one. Brita Stenbock herself had desired that her nephew should request the King to show this mark of favor, and joyously had he obeyed the command of his stern aunt.

April was breathing the first mild breezes from the south when Gustavus Rosen set out to brave the impassable journey to Stock-

holm. Thence he dispatched a messenger announcing the King's consent, and that, on the 1st of May, he would arrive; that he (Rosen), however, would be unable to return before that date, it being the King's pleasure that he should remain with him until then, to accompany him on the way.

April is by no means the usual harbinger of spring in Sweden. Snow yet lay thickly on the ground round Torpa; jackdaws still waited expectantly on Karin's window-sill, and, flying on to her shoulders, whispered into her ear the secret tidings they had gathered from without.

Sometimes, startled by sudden noises, they would whirr away. And there were many noises, of different kinds, to be heard in the ancient building which had lain so silent through the winter. Hammers resounded the whole day long, and countless hands were incessantly busied in fitting preparation for the royal guest, and the festivities which were to grace his presence. The apartments designed for the King and his suite were in the left wing of the castle; in the center one of them, a vast hall, was erected the altar. The whole castle, according to the custom of northern winter decoration, was adorned with fur boughs and mistletoe. Thus, from morn to night, reigned incessant noise and hurrying to and fro. Brita Stenbock's sightless eyes saw and ordered everything, while Karin's living ones gleamed with a strange light as she carried out her mother's

directions. It was singular but unmistakable; that radiant gleam had little or nothing to do with the altar that was being erected in the vast hall. It proceeded from those other eyes of Karin Stenbock; the eyes dreaded, but not understood, by her bridegroom.

Only when night came on did stir and bustle cease in the solitary castle. Then the workmen betook themselves to their rest in the quarters provided for them in the out-buildings. None of them slept in the castle. As soon as they had crossed the courtyard, Stenbock himself would shut the outer door and draw the heavy oaken bolts. Then until break of day no one had ingress, and not a sound more was to be heard from outside throughout the spacious building. Only within, now and again, were to be heard mysterious sounds as though Karin's jackdaws had effected an entrance, and under protection of the darkness were fluttering with cautious wing up the back staircase and along the long, unlit passages.

CHAPTER IV.

It was still early morning of the 1st of May when a brilliant cortége crossed the Wetter Lake, but yesterday freed from the remaining winter ice by the thawing of the Motala River, carrying it down to the Baltic. Many a spectator, gazing upon the flotilla so gayly dressed with flags, in the middle of which towered the richly decorated royal yacht, may have secretly cherished other wishes than those their timid lips expressed as the cortége, landing, proceeded westward along the broad roads upon which the peasants of the neighborhood had been for weeks employed, day and night, to render them suitable for the occasion. Away in Dalecarlia, perhaps there might have been lips more ready with curses, and Christian the Second, despite his numerous suite, would not have ridden so calmly past the broad-shouldered sons of the country, any one of whom, drawing his knife, might have driven it straight into the King's heart. But here there was nothing of that kind to fear. True, it was the 1st of May, but Sweden still lay bound and numbed under the iron hand of winter.

With looks as gloomy and icy as a winter's day rode Christian through the pale light of the

May sun, whose chill gleam mocked the name men gave the month begun on that day. The noble horse upon which the King rode was jet black from head to tail, save for its rich crimson caparisons, which made a glow of color like blood upon some dark floor, and for the snow-white star on its forehead, which resembled the white of the King's eyes, under his knitted brows, as ever and anon he glanced among the groups of people assembled by the wayside. His look had grown more frigid than ever since that night in Stockholm, and deep-lined furrows lay upon his forehead. A deadly gleam shot from those cruel eyes where he did not perceive terror-stricken, abject fear; it was plain that upon the merest fall of the royal eyelash depended the movement of the blood-stained ax, borne unsheathed by the savage "sponsor" of the King, who, following in his suite, bore it truculently upon his shoulder.

Perhaps the only one unobservant of all this was Gustavus Rosen. To him the May sun shone as warmly and brilliantly as in midsummer. The mist of springtide in his eyes hid from him the desolate landscape; he saw nothing but eagerness and loyal interest in the looks with which the spectators gazed upon the procession. By command of the King he rode on his Majesty's left; his horse prancing so joyously under him he could scarce hold him in. Christian was silent, as he had ever been; a silence which had increased upon him since his oppression of Sweden. Now and then he would

utter some curt word, which Rosen, sunk in his smiling, impatient dreams, did not always hear; nor did the King, in his morose brooding, await the answer. The house he was about to honor on his progress to Denmark was of no little importance in his schemes. In the person of Stenbock the whole remaining nobility of Sweden, now in terrified hiding, did him homage, at the same time that it bound Rosen fast to his interests. They were now riding over Falköpingfeld; the King rose in his stirrups to survey the scene. "We have managed matters better than Madame Semiramis, our royal grandmother," he suddenly exclaimed, in a sharp voice: "Queen Margaret was no agriculturist; she forgot that in order to make virgin soil fertile the stumps must be rooted out and the land well dunged. Had she done so then, the fair daughters of the land would have loved us better and have found us pleasanter to the eye. Or are you of opinion that in consideration of the office we have taken upon ourselves, the Rose of Trollhätta will be disposed to overlook our years, and bid us a loving welcome, Rosen?"

With a short laugh and with the rapidity of lightning, Christian's eye scanned his companion's face, who was searching in vain for an answer. But ere he had found one, the King resumed: "Here lie the bones hewn down by your and my brave forefathers, Rosen; maybe my horse's hoof is even now trampling down the shrewd skull of one of your ancestors, who was fool enough to suffer it to be cleft in twain

for such poor stuff as Sweden. We are wiser, Rosen; we enter upon no Calmarian Union for which flesh and blood had first to prepare the ground. We are about to celebrate a union which shall propagate flesh and blood. We will ride on faster; the sun is already about to set, and the Rose of Trollhätta awaits us."

His Majesty of Sweden, Norway and Denmark, King Christian the Second, was in a strange mood to-day, such as he had not displayed since his coronation day in Stockholm. Those members of his suite nearest to him exchanged furtive glances; there was something weird in his laugh, like the lurid glare of the sun before a devastating storm. Then, all putting spurs to their horses, were fain to follow the King's black horse, as it tore in mad speed over the field of Falköping.

It was already dusk, and the Castle of Torpa was ablaze with the light of torches and lamps when the royal bridal procession arrived. The lord of the castle stood bareheaded awaiting his august guest at the entrance. From behind the curtains of a room on the first floor Karin Stenbock was looking out. Her heart was beating quickly, her bosom heaving. It was with the eyes Gustavus Rosen dreaded that she scanned the royal cortége. She was not seeking her lover's face; her look did not rest upon him even when she did see him, but wandered hastily past him to the numerous horsemen who had already filled the courtyard, and were still crowding in behind, their halberds flashing in the twilight.

Karin's lips murmured the numbers, and her cheeks grew white; staggering, she clutched so wildly at the window curtains that they almost gave way. Then, silently hurrying away, she disappeared.

Without, Gustavus Stenbock held the King's stirrup for him to dismount. Christian, throwing a hasty glance over the ancient, long-lying building, now illuminated bright as day, condescendingly held out his hand to his host. For one instant it was as if Stenbock was seized by the same sudden weakness which had overtaken his daughter. Gazing fixedly at the royal hand without taking it, he raised his own to wipe the cold sweat from his brow. Christian, observing it, knitted his brows ominously.

"You invited us already in the autumn to visit you, Stenbock. Our captain duly delivered your invitation to us," he said, with a nuance of disdain only understood by his host. "True, you did not obey our command to honor us with your presence in Stockholm; but we are aware that circumstances prevented you, and you perceive that we bear you no ill-will for the omission, but have deigned to become your guest to-day, and merely expect from you a fitting welcome."

There must have been something in these words which restored to Stenbock his failing powers; for now, taking the King's still outstretched hand, he uttered, in a firm voice:

"Welcome, sire!"

The King ascended the carpeted steps, side by

side with his host. His guards pressed close after him, but upon the fifth step Christian turned.

"The King of Sweden is secure in Gustavus Stenbock's house," said he, "and needs no guard. Select twelve knights to accompany us, Captain Torben; the remainder may seek their quarters for the night. Come, Stenbock, we are fain to see this Rose whom, to-morrow, we are to give into Rosen's keeping."

And again King Christian laughed. At his first words Stenbock had again turned whiter than the wall against which he stood, and, stumbling, he almost fell back upon the knights behind. Now he again advanced with his guest and proceeded to lead him, with his retinue, into the apartments in the left wing of the castle where Brita Stenbock awaited them, standing erect in the center of the first, to bid the King welcome.

"Do I stand in presence of the King of Sweden?" she asked, in a clear voice.

Stenbock assented.

For the first time Christian's immovable face expressed surprise. He knew himself to be standing before the woman who was Denmark's bitterest enemy, whom he had always believed would rather bow her head upon the block than before him. A passing ray of real satisfaction crossed the King's gloomy face as Brita Stenbock resumed:

"Welcome, King Christian. I thank you in the name of my country, for I trust that your

stay in this house may be for the good of Sweden."

Brita Stenbock neither changed color nor hesitated as she spoke the words in clear, resonant voice. Still erect, her white head raised, her sightless eyes fixed before her, she stood, after having bowed low, waiting for the King's hand, who, in evident confusion, taking hers, led her to the head of the long banqueting-table spread in the adjoining apartment, where, taking her place by his side, with the aid of the serving-man standing behind her chair, she proceeded to fulfill all the duties of hostess as surely as though in full possession of her sight.

It was evident from the manner in which the blind lady upheld the dignity of her house that she was no ordinary woman. She seemed to feel her neighbor's eyes resting inquiringly upon her. And now King Christian, raising his golden goblet, touched that of his hostess in greeting, who, with steady hand, held hers toward him.

"To the well-being of this house!" said he, and drank.

"To the well-being of Sweden!" responded Brita Stenbock, as she drained her goblet, then calmly reseated herself.

The many lights upon the walls glistened upon the costly silver service with which the table was covered, and were reflected back from the rosy wine. The aroma of dainty dishes, artistically prepared, now being brought in, began to pervade the hall. The King's face expressed

content, although his eyes sought round the table. By degrees a look of impatience came across it, as, turning to his hostess, he asked:

“And the Rose of the festivities to which we were invited, why does she delay her coming? It seems to me I see a pair of expectant eyes below there, which, with even greater right than I, might well ask the question.” And he signed across to Gustavus Rosen, who occupied a place in the middle of the table, seeming deaf and blind to all passing around him.

Rosen, as soon as he could, with befitting respect, leave the King's side, had gone in search of his betrothed. He had sought her in every apartment of the castle, but without success. All whom he asked had just seen her, but no one seemed to know where she was at the moment. Sunk in moody brooding, Rosen did not even observe the King's gesture. But at that very moment he sprang up with radiant, joyous face; the long sought for one had appeared on the threshold of the door opposite to him.

Karin still looked somewhat pale; but in the reddish light of the torches her pallor seemed even to enhance her loveliness. She wore a white-trained gown of costly material, which, with the blue girdle round her waist, were the colors of Sweden. Her hair hung in golden profusion upon her bare shoulders. As she came forth into the full light of the brilliantly illuminated apartment her whole appearance was one of marvelous loveliness and majesty. Astounded at her beauty, all eyes turned upon her,

every hand, with goblet raised, sank back involuntarily to the table.

Two only of the guests at the banquet rose simultaneously from their places — Gustavus Rosen and the King. Karin being nearer to the latter, he was the first to reach her, as he exclaimed:

“I’ faith, Rose of Trollhätta, you are well named; and are, moreover, guilty of high treason for every minute you have withheld yourself from our royal eyes. In punishment whereof, we now separate you from your bridegroom, whose possession you are to-morrow to become, to the envy of thousands. The Queen of Sweden is not here to take her rightful seat by our side; you, in her absence, are the one to whom it is due. Come, Maid of Trollhätta — we challenge you, ladies and gentlemen, to follow our example and do homage to the Queen of the Evening.”

And taking her by the hand, he led her, with all the deference due to a princess of the blood, to the seat on his right hand. With one rapid look of greeting to her betrothed, Karin, with all the haughty dignity of a real queen, took her place by Christian’s side, who straightway emptied his goblet in her honor. The knights of his retinue did likewise, bowing low before the daughter of the house. In the King’s eyes, fixed upon her and her alone, there was an expression which caused them to bow even lower than they probably would have done to the true Queen of Sweden, sitting lonely in her castle in

Copenhagen. Rosen could scarce believe his own eyes; could this be the same Karin who, for the slavery of her fatherland, could be oblivious of her love? Her eyes were those he dreaded, which knew not Rosen, and now hung upon every gesture of King Christian. She smiled upon him, and he drank the wine she tasted. The flattering speeches he poured into her ear drove the blood crimsoning to her cheeks.

"She is handsomer than the Dove of Amsterdam—she will bring luck to Sweden," murmured the knights aside to each other, amid the clatter of goblets.

Had Karin Stenbock seen but one way left to save Sweden—and had she taken it—the way Esther once trod to the throne of the King of Persia? Then truly thou art a courageous woman, Karin Stenbock, and posterity will admire, perhaps laud thee. But thy love was false and thine heart worthless. Pause yet on the way; thou tremblest, and thine eye yet often seeketh that of thy father, as though thou wert seized with sudden dread. Is it he who hath sold thee for Sweden's weal—he, whose unflinching eye doth encourage the daughter to go on the way which is foul treachery to Gustavus Rosen?

It was a festive night such as Torpa had not seen for many a long day, perhaps had never seen before. King Christian, as a rule, was an abstemious man. Since the massacre in Stockholm he had not touched wine that his wine-taster had not previously tasted. But with

Karin by his side his suspicious fears were lulled, and he drained every bumper filled for him by her white hands. His eyes hung entranced upon her face; his potations began to make his tongue so heavy that, in lieu of whispers, he now spoke so loud that Brita Stenbock must have heard every ardent word addressed to her daughter. Yet, like her husband, she sat on unmoved, rigid as a statue in her curiously carved high-backed chair. Gustavus Rosen, too, filled his goblet full oft from the silver jug before him, and drained it hastily, trying to escape thought, to drown it—until tomorrow.

It was past midnight. The King seemed disposed to retire; yet delayed. His arm rested on the back of Karin's chair; his lips moved as if about to speak, then closed again.

"Fair Karin," he said at last, in as low a voice as he could command, "it is time for us to part. I would fain sleep under your protection, lovely Rose. Where is my chamber? Is it far from yours? Sleep will flee from my eyes if I may no longer hear your gentle breathing."

Every vestige of color had forsaken the young girl's face, yet she remained beside him, as if bewitched, and he continued, raising his wine-enflamed eyes to hers, and with heavy tongue:

"Do you not know that it is my right to watch over you to-night that no intruder enters your chamber? I might command you not

to secure your door—I only entreat, Karin—not as the King, who may command, but as your friend, who, ere a fresh day breaks, must have speech again with you. Will you await me? Else I will have my horse saddled now, this instant, and ride away, and another may lead you to the altar—if he dare. Do not answer; only drink me a yes, if I may come.”

Now the King had spoken in so low a voice as only to reach the ears for whom his words were intended.

Karin raised her goblet, though with such trembling hand that the wine flowed like blood upon the table. Her eyes looked wildly from Christian to her father. “Courage,” prompted Stenbock’s unflinching eyes. “Courage!” And Karin, touching her goblet against that of the King, drank.

A glow, red as the spilled wine, flamed in his eyes.

“Let them see to it,” he whispered, “that my suite are so disposed for the night as not to interfere with, or interrupt us. I have much to discourse with you, Karin.”

The royal arm, thrown about her chair, now drew closer round her, and his hand was boldly laid upon hers, despite her shrinking movement of repulsion, while with his left hand detaching a gold, heavily jeweled chain from his neck he slid it into her lap.

“Hang this on the handle of your door,” he said, “that I may know the sweet garden

wherein so perfect a rose is blooming. And tell me how I may reach it unobserved."

No snow figure formed by child's hand could be whiter than was Karin Stenbock's face, as, leaning toward the King, she stammered in broken, almost inaudible accents:

"To the right of your majesty's door is a corridor; count thirteen steps and turn off to the left; there you will find a door which will lead you to me. The chain, hanging from it, shall show you which. In one hour, after all have gone to rest, I will await you."

The girl's strength was exhausted. Her head fell back half-swooning against her chair.

King Ahasuerus, glowing at her with drunken glance, rose. "Our queen is weary," said he, in a loud voice, filling himself another bumper. "We will drink to her fair dreams to-night."

Once more the golden goblets were raised, and the courtiers bowed low to the May sun, which had so unexpectedly risen before them in this midnight hour. Then they prepared to follow their royal master, who, however, stopped them with gesture of command:

"We require no guard to-night, Captain Torpen, and desire to rest undisturbed. Our generous host has, doubtless, in his hospitality, provided you with comfortable night-quarters where you can sleep off the effects of his excellent wine. We thank you, Stenbock; we are well pleased with your entertainment. Rosen will allow us to exercise our privilege of guest

and thank our fair hostess according to time-honored custom."

Christian's unfettered nature had lost all self-command, and as he spoke he threw his arm round Karin and kissed her forehead, murmuring:

"In an hour."

The terrible struggle Esther had fought with herself was conquered.

"In an hour," she repeated, in low, but firm voice. "Do not forget my instructions."

CHAPTER V.

SILENCE has descended upon Castle Torpa. Night reigns over Sweden; only the shadows of clouds over the face of the moon scud over the battlefields of Falköping and Bogesund; only the waters of the Mälar murmur against the steps of the deserted palace in Stockholm, in gentle endeavor to wash away the remaining traces of blood from their granite surface. Their soft plash is as a sound of coming spring in the west; the waters of the Hjelm Lake, hearing it, carry it further over the immense waste of the Wener Lake; the thunders of Trollhätta take up the strain: "Spring is coming." Karin's jackdaws, too, have heard it, and are celebrating it in the moonlight. Perhaps it is in fear of the glistening halberds thronging the gardens and courtyard of Torpa, that no shadow of earth or air may approach the royal couch unperceived, that they are assembling on the lonely shores of Trollhätta. The May sun of one day has not had power to thaw the snow lying so thick over the rocky hills; thus the movements of the dark figures are clearly defined upon it. They seem to make no sound, yet it may be that it is lost in the din of the roaring cataract. So clear is

the moonlight now that they may be counted as they cross the Götaelf above the Falls. They number just forty, and as they come over the ford, turning down stream, somewhat in the direction of the hill, they all at once slip down, one after the other, into the earth, where they must have made their nests, and thus disappear from the face of the moonlit valley, as though swept away by the wind. The stillness that has fallen over Torpa is only broken by the regular tramp of the guards.

Throughout the castle reigns darkness and silence. Up in the second story Captain Torben and his comrades lie sleeping on luxurious couches. The revelry over night makes them sleep soundly; not one of them is sensible of the roar of the Trollhätta, which, at night, is heard for miles around.

In a lofty apartment, dimly lighted, reclines Christian the Second upon a seat covered with costly embroideries. For an instant he had thrown himself upon the silken Arabian bed, over which gleamed a large, richly gilded crown; but his agitation and impatience had quickly driven him from it again. He fixed his vacant eyes upon the crimson window-curtains, which, in the dim light of the hanging lamp, seem to flow to the ground like streams of blood, as they gently move in the night air—the King having flung open his window to cool his heated brow. Ever since the previous autumn the ruler of the three United Kingdoms has grown nervous and superstitious. The red

color of the hangings makes him shudder. He springs off his couch and bends forward, staring fixedly at the swaying curtains.

No—he gives no thought to the mangled heads which rolled at his feet last autumn in Stockholm; not at this moment. A stronger attraction has chased away his fears. His heated fancy pictures another head whose golden sheen of hair falls upon a pair of white shoulders, and, straining his ear in the death-like silence of the house, he throws off his tunic, under which glistens a shirt of closely-wrought, flexible steel mail. For an instant he hesitates, then, unfastening this also, he suffers it to fall with a clang to the ground, and envelops himself in a costly silken garment reaching to his feet.

Christian the Second is still in the forties, and as he passes by the lofty metal mirror it gives him the reflection of a handsome man of kingly presence, who, even without his kingship, might well think to win the heart of a girl of eighteen. It is not wine alone that has chased from his face the gloomy mistrust and the lines which so disfigure it. He had loved the beautiful Dyveke perhaps as deeply and passionately as Gustavus Rosen loved Karin Stenbock, and the Rose of Trollhätta was full as lovely as the Dove of Amsterdam.

You have attained your end, Esther. Tomorrow morning will see your power supreme over the morose conqueror of your Fatherland, and Sweden's salvation, so long dreamt of with

your eyes, those other eyes of yours, will lie in your white hands.

Does she also think thus, who, with those same white hands pressed tightly upon her quick heaving bosom, is now standing in her chamber, upon whose further door fastening hangs the golden chain, its diamonds flashing in the dim light of the hall, sending out beacons into the darkness of the corridor?

Karin's face is as deadly white as when, exhausted, she fell back by Christian's side. Yet she no longer trembles; she, too, hearkens expectantly in the death-like silence of the house.

Now a gentle, cautious step approaches, audible only to the keenest ear in the all-pervading stillness of the night. But it does not come along the corridor, but through the next room, pausing by the door through whose opening Gustavus Folkung had, unperceived, seen Brita Stenbock. An almost imperceptible knock, and Karin, quickly and noiselessly slipping the bolt, opens it, and finds herself next moment in Gustavus Rosen's arms, who, with passionate embrace, kisses her forehead, eyes, and lips, as he stammers out:

"You would have driven me mad, Karin, had you not whispered me you would await me here to-night. After a whole month of sleepless days and nights spent away from you I come back to see you keep away from me for hours. Only to see you—to get not one word, not one look from you!"

His voice had grown louder in his agitation. Freeing herself from his arms, Karin, terrified, placed her hand over his lips.

"Be still," she whispered.

Her eyes roved from him to the further door, and putting her lips to his ear, she breathed:

"In a few minutes King Christian will be coming through that door to seek me. I fear him; that is why I summoned you. You are my protector, and must be in that room, at hand, Gustavus. It had been differently planned; and my mother had ordered me to tell you nothing. But the garden and courtyard are filled with armed men; and everything has had to be altered. I dared not have carried it out had I not known that I should have you at hand."

The young man stared at her in speechless astonishment; his thoughts forsook him, his mind refused to take in what she said.

Putting her lips still more closely to his ear, she whispered a few hurried words, which sent him staggering back in horror, as he clasped his hand to his forehead.

"Here—where I have brought him—where my honor is pledged— Impossible—never!" he stammered, breathlessly.

Karin's sapphire eyes grew almost black, as she gazed full at him.

"Gustavus," she said, with shaking voice. "Are you no Swede? My hand can only be given to a Swede."

He looked at her in consternation and despair.

"Time is flying, the King may leave his room at any moment," she continued, hurriedly. "The gleam of his lamp in the corridor is the signal for Gustavus Folkung—" she broke off abruptly, in listening attitude. Her eyes, turned from Rosen, had not caught the wild expression that had suddenly crossed his face. It had needed but one spark to fall into his oppressed, stunned heart, and Karin, by her mention of the name which aroused within him the hydra-headed monster, had effectually lighted the latent flame of jealousy.

"Ah, Gustavus Folkung!" he laughed, with ringing peal. "Does he come to fetch you—Gustavus Folkung!"

And wildly pushing Karin aside, who rushed after him, he dashed out of the room by the further door, tearing it open with such violence that it sent the gold chain clanging to the ground.

The sound of his raised voice, the noise of his hurrying footsteps, awoke an echo in the lofty passage leading by a flight of stairs to the castle gardens. A confused murmur of voices was to be heard below; sounds of a hurrying to and fro—of "Betrayed!" "Back!" then a firm voice, rising above the confusion, commands: "Forward!"

They are Karin's jackdaws, who, creeping underground, have come out at the other side. None will give way to the other; in close array they storm along the narrow passage.

Yet another second and they will have cut

off the retreat of the man, who, in long dressing-gown, and shielding the light of his lamp with his hand, is approaching.

King Christian's fevered senses take in nothing. He counts the thirteen steps, then turns to the left.

Suddenly Gustavus Rosen, rushing upon him like a madman, seizes him by the arm, screaming: "Save yourself!" and drags him back with him to the apartment the King had but just quitted. "Your majesty is betrayed! Gustavus Vasa has entered the castle from Trollhätta by a subterranean passage!"

These are no jackdaws which fill up every corridor and passage. They are the herculean forms of the Dalecarlians, every man of whom could catch up the King of Denmark in his arms as easily as a child. Gustavus Stenbock leads them, and they come rushing on. The plan has failed. Now not silence but immediate action is the sole hope.

"Where is the tyrant?" They have come upon Karin hastening after her lover; she points out the way to them.

In her eyes every ray of the light he loves is extinguished. With lips trembling with scorn and fury, she cries:

"He has taken refuge in his own room. Gustavus Rosen has betrayed us!"

A wild curse passed the lips of the foremost, and Gustavus Folkung, sword in hand, dashed in the direction her finger had pointed. The fugitives are not yet out of the corridor; the

King's light had gone out, and in their haste and confusion they have gone beyond the door of his room. Their lives, the fate of Sweden, hangs on a second of time. But Gustavus Rosen knows every inch of Castle Torpa, even in the dark. There is no corner in which he has not played as a boy, has not roamed with Karin, hand in hand. Feeling backward, his hand has reached the doorway, and dragging the King in with him, he draws the bolts, at the very instant that Folkung's hand without shakes the strong fastenings. "Where's an ax! Break the door in! Go round to the other side of the room, Stenbock!"

But the strong door resists; and in answer, Rosen's voice is heard from the window:

"Help!—help! The King is being murdered!"

In a moment, the stillness of the night is over and gone. A hundred calls resound on every side. There is a thunder of armed men upon the broad terrace steps beneath; above, Captain Torben and his company, springing from their beds and grasping their swords, swarm downstairs, half dressed. They come upon Stenbock and his men, who, having rushed through the banqueting hall, are endeavoring to force an entrance to the King's apartment on the other side.

The spears so fearlessly wielded by the Dalecarlians to oust the bears from their dens are now turned with deadly fury upon the bare breasts of the Danes. Not yet fully awake,

Knut Torben, staggering up to the powerful form of the gray-headed master of the castle, shouts:

“We were sleeping peacefully under your roof. Is this your Swedish hospitality, Gustavus Stenbock?”

“Stockholm hospitality! Knut Torben—taught us by you!” thundered he back as he drove his sword into the captain’s temples, who, with a cry, fell to the ground, his lifeless body rolling close to the seat upon which, but a few hours before, he had pledged the daughter of the man who had slain him. Round the banqueting table rages the fight, the costly silver flies about the hall; but the dying Danes have availed to keep back the Vale men for the decisive minute from the King’s inner door, and, at Rosen’s cry, help is coming up on all sides. Torches, lighted by the breathless soldiers, now make hall and corridors light as day.

“We are lost! Retreat!” calls Stenbock, desperately.

The Dalecarlians are but forty against hundreds; it were but mad desperation to further pursue their intention. Now the danger threatens that they may be cut off from their retreat. This Stenbock shouts to Folkung, who, turning to Karin, standing motionless, staring as if stunned at the approaching Danes, encircles her with his arm.

“We shall meet again, Christian!” he muttered through his teeth. Then, with superhuman strength, which not one of his colossal

followers could have outdone, he caught up the unresisting girl and carried her along with him. The others covered his retreat, making as bold a stand in the narrow passage as had done Leonidas's host in Thermopylæ. Their short weapons were as nothing against the long halberds of the Danes; but as each man fell, his body helped to block up the narrow way.

Now King Christian, clad in his shirt of mail, issued forth from the door which had stood him in such good stead. Gustavus Rosen, following him, looked ghastly pale as his eyes wandered over the scene of battle into which his cry for help had changed the peaceful home of his childhood. The torches threw a lurid, awful light upon the faces, stilled forever, lying around. Suddenly, looking beyond the combatants struggling in deadly fury, his eyes caught sight of something white at the far end of the passage. It was Karin's dress. Starting from his bewilderment, he dashed back, across the hall and down the terrace steps, calling, as he went, to the soldiers he met to follow him to that corner of the garden where lay the outer door through which Karin had once secretly conducted Folkung. "This way!" and with the powerful halberd he had seized from the man nearest him, he commenced battering at the oaken door, a hundred eager blows seconding him. It yielded to their efforts, the last support succumbing to Rosen's fury, and for a second time, on that very spot, he

stood facing Folkung's flashing eyes. But this time they had lost their power over him. Unheeding the spears of the Dalecarlians, who pressed close after their leader, he seized his betrothed by the shoulder, lying unconscious on Folkung's left arm, as, with the right, he had wrenched back the battered door.

"Karin!" cried Rosen, "Karin!"

So bitter, despairing a ring there was in his voice that it might have called back the dead to life; and it aroused her he called from her swoon. It was the voice of the one she loved, causing every fiber of her heart to thrill; and, opening her eyes wide, she looked at him.

"Karin!"

"Back, traitor!"

Convulsively shuddering, she stretched out her hands to warn him off with gesture of aversion.

Gustavus Rosen was in the act of seizing hold of Folkung to hold him back; but at sight of Karin's look of aversion his hand fell powerless. It was her last, for her white dress sank as though sucked in by the earth into the darkness. Motionless, as though struck by lightning, Rosen stood facing the Vale men, pressing on toward him; the next instant the soldiers dragging him back, unarmed as he was, cover him. And now the fight breaks out anew on this side the narrow passage, but this time to the advantage of the Swedes, who succeed in forcing back the Danes, heavily pressed on both sides, to the outer door, thus maintaining possession of the

subterranean passage. The soldiers, supposing there to be no outlet and those who have taken refuge there to be their prisoners, relax their ardor, not to drive them to extremities.

Some dozen Dalecarlians lie pierced with halberds under wellnigh fifty of the King's guards, but the remainder having reached the massive door, it is hurled back into its fastenings by the last man with loud drawing of strong bolts, and secured from within by mighty beams drawn across. Then he, bleeding and wounded, follows the others, who, as if flying over hot coals, speed along the long, unlit way, which, since dark days have set in for Sweden, has rescued many a one fleeing from the besieged castle, and will do so now. True, the foremost carries a far other burden than he had dreamed of for his spoil. It was to have been a man—it is a young girl; he should have worn the golden crown of Scandinavia—from her swooning head floats streams of golden hair. Yet Gustavus Folkung bears her in his arms as though she were a queen. Ever nearer comes the loud rumbling sound which shakes the bowels of the earth; they have reached the egress where the jackdaws a few short hours before had disappeared into the ground. Bending his knee, Folkung rolls the great stone aside, and with the gust of cool, fresh air that rushes in, the deafening roar of the Trollhätta strikes, all unawares, upon the fugitives' ears. It arouses Karin from her death-like swoon, and she shivers slightly in the chill May air. Care-

fully, as though she were a child committed to him, her protector covers her with his mantle and strides on, followed by his men. There is a sharp whistle, which is answered from the opposite shore of the stream, and a dark mass is seen being rapidly propelled across the river, which soon assumes the form of a ferry-boat. It grates the shore and Folkung springs in and lays his burden gently on soft cushions in the bottom of the boat. With gloomy brow, Stenbock follows, and the Vale men fill the boat.

But suddenly they are thrown into confusion. Karin, opening her eyes, has cried: "Where is mother?" And Stenbock, with stifled cry and oath, exclaims: "By Heavens! We had forgotten her. She is in the tyrant's power. Turn back!"

"Impossible!" returns the leader's determined voice. "It were certain destruction, and, moreover, useless."

But Stenbock, unheeding him, forces his way through the boat's company to reach the shore again. At that instant a loud cry is heard:

"Here they are—seize them. Jump into the water—a boat!"

It is Gustavus Rosen, the only one of the pursuers who knows of the subterranean passage, and who, on seeing the Dalecarlians disappear down it, in maddened desperation has collected a body of soldiers and made his way with lightning speed over the ascent of the Trollhätta.

But he is too late.

The authoritative voice of Folkung is heard: "Forward, men! Sweden is of more importance than a woman, even though her name be Brita Stenbock!" And with powerful rhythmic strokes of the oars the boat disappears like lightning from the bank. The Danes raise their spears to fling them with unfailing aim among the closely packed ranks of the fugitives. But Rosen, throwing himself before them, cries, in horror:

"No, no—you would kill *her*!"

Astonished, they replace their spears, then pressing forward, forcibly hold back the young man, who is springing into the water to follow the boat. Dragging him roughly back, they listen with mingled scorn and indifference to his heart-broken cries:

"Karin—Karin!"

The agonized sound penetrates distinctly to mid-stream. Gustavus Stenbock hears it not. Covering his gray head with his mantle, he seeks to conceal the bitter tears wrung as hotly and despairingly from his heart as from that of the younger man, lamenting joys he has not yet known. But both Folkung and Karin hear it; they hear the piteous, despairing cry:

"Gustavus Vasa! I will do all thou wilt—only give her back to me, Gustavus Vasa!"

Karin, starting up, looks inquiringly into her companion's face, in the dim light of dawn.

"By what name is he calling you? Are you Gustavus Ericsson?"

He nods assent.

"Yes, Karin. You learn it from your betrothed's farewell greeting."

With bitter laugh as he speaks, he throws himself hurriedly before her to shield her from the spears which now swish through the air, and fall, hissing round them, into the troubled water. On hearing the name of the fugitive leader, the Danes, no longer heeding Rosen's feeble resistance, have pushed him aside, and are hurling their weapons with concentrated fury after the fast receding boat. But it is already beyond reach of their aim, and a few strokes more places them out of danger.

"Will you go back to Gustavus Rosen, Karin?" asks her companion. "Say but the word, and I myself will take you to him."

The voice is the same hard voice which addressed her last autumn at the Falls of Trollhätta, and yet there is a something wavering in it, perhaps caused by the swaying of the boat, as they near the opposite shore.

Karin answers quickly: "Never. Between him and me there is an abyss wide as the Trollhätta, between this shore and the other. My heart no longer belongs to the betrayer of Sweden."

Gustavus Ericsson's firm lips tremble imperceptibly.

"Then to Sweden's deliverer, Karin? Will your heart be given to him who shall save Sweden from Christian's tyranny?"

A shudder passes through her. She is about

to answer, when the boat, at that moment, striking the shore with violent jerk, she staggers, and would have fallen had not Gustavus Vasa's arm supported her. Holding her cold hand in his, he whispers, hurriedly, as he leans toward her:

“Who shall win this fair hand, Karin?”

“This hand—” It has grown so light that her changing color, from white to rosy-red, is plainly seen; her sparkling eyes wander toward the still immovable figure of her father, covered in his mantle, and with feverish haste she repeats—“this hand—” Then suddenly looking, with steady eyes, at the man standing by her side, she continues: “This hand is free, Gustavus Ericsson, as the Trollhätta can bear witness, and belongs to him who carries out two things—”

The Falls of Trollhätta, in their roar, deaden the words so hastily whispered by Karin's lips. Those waters of which tradition tells that the ancient bard, as he stood by them, seized by the demoniacal power of the thundering cataract was helplessly sucked down into their depths.

Does she think of this, as, shivering in the chill morning air, her eyes follow the course of the green waves hurrying past. Does she remember the words, once so painfully wrung from her heart: “Do not grow weary, poor Gustavus. If you were to grow weary, and the current had seized me so that you could

not save me from it—" No, there is a grave expression in her eyes; but she is not thinking of those words, is not thinking of Gustavus Rosen. Her companion's eyes, too, are grave, as he hears the words of her low whisper.

Then, bending over her, he says:

"I have said that Sweden's fate was more to me than a woman. You are the first woman, Karin Stenbock, who has ever shaken my will. Sweden's future be upon your head if it be lost for sake of a woman!" And bowing to her with knightly dignity, he passed on to the Dalecarlians, who had already landed, and chose out four from among them, to whom he gave some orders in a low voice. The hearts of the Vale men know no fear, else the expression of their eyes might betoken it, as they receive his bidding. And as little as fear do they know want of discipline toward their leader; thus, at a word, they hasten back toward their boat, while he, approaching Stenbock, addresses him in a low voice. At the first word, the latter's face assumes a look of almost youthful vigor and he makes a hasty movement to follow the men. But Gustavus Vasa, holding him back, continues his hurried talk, to which Stenbock, reluctantly signing assent, shakes him long and warmly by the hand in Swedish fashion.

"All obey him," thinks Karin, following the proud, almost regal bearing of the young man with her eyes, as he springs into the boat with

the four men and stands upright among them, as they, keeping close into shore, begin pulling up-stream. "All must obey him—they as well as I. He is like the Trollhätta."

A hand waving to her from the receding boat interrupts Karin's thoughts. She returns it, as, opening her lips, she involuntarily begins, "Gustavus!" Then, quickly recollecting, she says, "Farewell, Gustavus Vasa!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE first pale light of dawn was struggling with the ruddy glare of the torches as Gustavus Rosen returned to Castle Torpa. He dragged his feet after him wearily; his cheeks were sunken and hollow from that night's anguish, as though after a wasting illness; his eyes had lost their light. Without aim or object he had walked on mechanically, instinct guiding him to the scene of his past joys and present misery.

An officer, hastening to him as he entered the courtyard, informed him that the King had been inquiring for him many times; and, taking the young man by the arm, conducted him straightway to the royal presence.

To the initiated it was very evident that the King was in one of his most dangerous moods. Guarded by a strong body of soldiers, the serving-men and maids of the House of Stenbock stood penned into one corner of the apartment; while Christian, sitting on a high-backed chair by the window, called up each one severally and questioned him or her. Their statements, one

and all, were similar and evidently truthful. They had known nothing of the projected attack upon the King, and had been taken quite as much by surprise by it as had the sovereign himself. The truth of what they said was on the face of it, inasmuch as not one had attempted to take to flight in the subsequent confusion, but had suffered themselves to be surrounded by the soldiers without effort at resistance. And King Christian too was persuaded of the truth of their statements, for he said, with a laugh, to each as he dismissed them:

“You are right. Yes, I see you have had your night’s rest disturbed for no reason. I will take care that it does not happen again. You can go!” And at his signal the witness was led away. But at the moment he reached the head of the staircase in the anteroom, the executioner’s ax caught him from behind, so that the head, without time to utter one cry, rolled down the stairs, while the body fell with dull thud in the corridor. One after the other disappeared, until at last only one young maid-servant remained. Christian, beginning to feel sated with the monotonous amusement, standing up, looked out of the window. Then turning to the girl, he examined her handsome, expressive features, which, presenting the true Swedish type, bore at the same time a likeness to Karin Stenbock, though of coarser mold. Looking curiously at her, he laughed more loudly than before.

"At the foot of the staircase lie some dozen of fools' heads. If you would keep yours on your shoulders, wench, go collect them in your apron and bring them up to me."

The girl fell back fainting.

"Carry her out," said he, "and see that she complies with my command."

"The wench bears resemblance to the daughter of that scoundrel Stenbock," muttered one of the suite to his neighbor. "She is probably a fair step-sister of whom our good hostess has as little suspicion as of the heads now decorating her staircase."

The speaker started, for, sharply turning his head, Christian shot him a ferocious look. Then rushing to the door through which the fainting girl was being led, he seized her shoulder with iron grip, and, twisting her round, stared into her face with an expression of savage ferocity.

"He is right; she is one of the brood," he muttered. "It is the grinning mask that betrayed me!"

And ere the girl could fall upon her knees, the King of Sweden, Norway and Denmark, snatching the broadsword from the hand of one of his guards, himself severed the head from the body of the victim lately pardoned, bestowing a further blow upon the golden head as it rolled upon the floor.

It was at that moment that Gustavus Rosen entered the apartment. The King's eyes, roving round, perceived him instantly, and he advanced with a loud laugh toward him.

"There lies the head of your lady love, Rosen," he cried. "Kiss it, man!"

The young fellow's brain was so unhinged that at sight of the fair head, which death had not robbed of its resemblance to Karin, he had nearly broken down. But another peal of loud laughter from the King roused him from his bewilderment.

"Not this time!" continued the King. "The Rose of Trollhätta has escaped us both. Damn it"—the veins on his forehead swelled, and he stamped his foot with such violence that the walls shook, and those present trembled—"who is the villain who suffered her to escape? You are every one of you traitors, whom I should do well to hang, draw and quarter!"

No one dared to meet the King's eyes, who, his face distorted with fury, had snatched up the sword from the ground and was wielding it, like one seized with sudden madness, over the heads of the crouching, terrified Danes, making it cut through the air. Once only had they seen him thus before, after the death of the Dove of Amsterdam, supposed to have been poisoned by some member of Torben Oxe's household. It was a known fact that it was not defiance to his sovereign power which aroused his worst accesses of mania, but when a weak spot, unknown to any, was touched in his affections. Thus it had not been Gustavus Ericsson, but Karin Stenbock, who had excited him to this mad outbreak. Gradually, as no one ventured to oppose him, he calmed down, and looking fixedly at

the blood-stained blade in his hand, threw himself gloomily upon his chair and leaned heavily upon the sword, digging it into the floor; then gave command:

“Bring Brita Stenbock in!”

A few seconds, and they led her in. Her arms were laden with the heavy chains, which always accompanied the Danish King on his travels; but she wore them as though they had no weight; nor did a muscle of her face betray fear or agitation. But at sight of her Gustavus Rosen staggered back against a pillar, his eyes resting horrified upon his aunt's impassive face, his own slowly flushing crimson as the consciousness of all he had brought to her dawned upon him.

For a minute a death-like stillness reigned in the vast apartment, in the center of which stood Brita Stenbock, tall, erect. At length, breaking the silence, she asked in a loud voice:

“Who desired my presence?”

The King started as if affrighted. His eyes had been fixed upon the ground.

“I,” he replied, with unsteady voice.

“It is the voice of Christian of Denmark.”

Any one, looking at him, might have thought that the sightless eyes of his irreconcilable enemy had regained life, so nervously did he avoid looking in the direction in which she had involuntarily turned her face. There was another pause; then the King gave sudden command:

“Remove the chains from off her!”

With astonished looks his guards obeyed.

The King, rising, made a few hesitating steps toward her.

"Brita Stenbock, you would have accomplished my murder!"

"I would have had you sentenced to death. You are the *murderer*!" she answered, coldly.

It seemed as though he, whom all feared, felt fear before a woman. Uneasily he now raised his eyes to her face; he had no power over Brita Stenbock's sightless orbs.

"You had invited me to your house. I confided in Swedish hospitality," he continued, slowly.

"You had invited the nobility of Sweden to your house in Stockholm. It confided in Danish hospitality."

Christian's eyes sank to the ground. Was it the reaction of the excitement he had lately undergone? His lips trembled; with an effort to control his thoughts to obey him, he continued:

"You gave me hand, and bade me welcome to your house, Brita Stenbock."

"You gave your hand to those you meant to slay, and bade them welcome. In the name of my fatherland I returned you thanks, and said I hoped your sojourn in this house would be for Sweden's weal. To your toast to the welfare of my house I responded with one to the welfare of Sweden. Why were you so blind as not to understand my words? Why did you let your seeing eyes be fooled by my sightless ones?"

There was deep scorn in her tone and words.

With ever more breathless amazement did the onlookers gaze at the audacious woman, and at the uneasy expression and strangely altered countenance of the tyrant. Pressing his hand to his forehead, he essayed to make answer, but his tongue seemed to refuse to obey his will; at last, with a manifest effort, he said:

“It is war against war, cunning against cunning. You hate me, and with reason, Brita Stenbock. War and cunning are the ruling powers with us men; and I look upon you as a man. You have fought a brave fight. The more I think of it, the higher I esteem you for it. Tell me frankly. It was your brain from which the plan emanated. It was known to none but you. You put it into action, and no hand was in it but yours. Say yes, and I will reward the magnitude of your conception by restoring you your liberty.”

Are there in that spacious hall, where a hundred eyes are resting upon her, only the sightless ones of Brita Stenbock which see—which alone apprehend the one spot through which she can penetrate the meshes of his coat of mail to the heart, to the very center of the heart, of her mortal enemy?

A weird, scoffing, triumphant expression drew down the corners of the blind woman's mouth.

“No, Christian of Denmark, you esteem me too highly. Mine was but the counsel; neither the idea nor its execution proceeded from me. It was a girl who outdid you in cunning. The plan was my daughter's. She knew you not,

nor ever thought that you would bring a whole army with you to a marriage feast. The battle was to have been at Torpa; your scaffold the altar. But when my daughter became aware of the number of your retainers—”

King Christian's hand slid slowly from his forehead.

“When your daughter became aware of the number of my retainers—” he repeated, with a strange sob in his voice.

“Coming to me, she said, ‘Christian of Denmark is not only a tyrant, he is a weak fool. Mother, is Sweden's freedom worth, is his undoing worth, my acting the part of the Inn-keeper's Daughter of Bergen to-night?’”

Even Brita Stenbock shrank back at the wild cry, half groan, half roar, which burst from the King's breast as he fell back upon his chair, hiding his face in both hands. No one dared to breathe in the room. From under the King's hand rolled heavy tears, like drops of blood, onto the ground; there was such profound stillness that they could be heard as they fell. Then his hands convulsively sought the hilt of the sword still stuck into the floor, and drew it fiercely out, with wild, loud laugh, as he cried:

“You relate well, Brita Stenbock, but time is too short to allow us longer to be entertained by your powers of recital. So we, the tyrant, have buried Swedish hospitality, loyalty and honor? You are right again, we were a weak fool!”

“You may scoff, Christian,” exclaimed the gray-headed lady, drawing herself fearlessly up

at his words, "but I have hit you. My eyes are blind, and others may deem that you are laughing. I see you, and see into your heart, and I know that it is bleeding under my hand."

A scream of rage escaped the King's quivering lips as, raising his sword, he rushed upon the defenseless woman. But an instant, and she had followed the fate of the maid-servant, and the gray head had rolled beside the golden one. But this time Gustavus Rosen, springing forward, horror-struck, received the blow upon his arm.

For a moment Christian stood immovable, staring into the young man's white face. Then letting the sword fall from his clinched fingers, he said, icily:

"I thank you, Rosen. I have been the cause of your losing one bride; I will procure you another— Are you ready, Brita Stenbock?"

The meaning lay in the tone not in the words of this last question. All present understood him. She, to whom they were addressed, not least. Yet she showed no fear; but throwing back her head, answered:

"You have no power to judge me, Christian; you can only kill me. Death has no fear for me; and of what use is my death to you? You may slay me with the sword, but that will not kill the traditions of this house. My eyes are sightless, but in their night I read the future. The day is coming when all Sweden will be a Torpa; I see blood flowing—more than ever ran

into the Mälar—but it flows toward the Sound, illuminated in its course by giant torches. By their light I see you, Christian of Denmark, powerless, deserted, despised, abhorred. I see you striking your pallid forehead, laden with your people's curses and the scorn of men, against your prison walls. I see the ghosts of Stockholm jeer and laugh at you through the iron bars of your window, and how they strike terror into your craven soul, frightening you back to life because you fear the Throne upon which you do not sit, and before which you are arraigned. In that day will Trollhätta's roar proclaim the freedom of Sweden as plainly to every ear as now it does to mine alone!"

Majestically the speaker's hand was outstretched, and in the death-like silence which followed her words the roar of Trollhätta was clearly audible to all, as, bursting the last ice fetters of winter, it bore them with its terrific force to the Lake—Sweden's announcement that spring was at hand—as if it were dashing its vast volume of water against the very walls of Torpa. Even King Christian remained for a moment an involuntary listener; but it was with the old gloomy, evil expression upon his face, over which his treacherous smile played fitfully.

"Your eyes are too keen, and see too far into the future, Brita Stenbock," he said, mockingly. "I will make it light about you, that you may better see the present. I will build you a giant memorial that the Trollhätta cannot roar down;

for it is mine, and its waters henceforth shall flow on as gently and obediently whither I shall guide it, as shall your people. The spirit of this house will not spread over your fatherland, converting it into a Torpa, because that giant torch your prophetic eyes have seen is Torpa, in whose burning you shall lie helpless and forsaken. No, not altogether forsaken." Here King Christian turned abruptly. "I have already told you that I owe you thanks, Gustavus Rosen, for reminding me what pertains to the King, and what to his executioner. You will readily admit and understand that I am unable at this juncture to restore your young bride to you; but I have come to your wedding, and for the few fiery moments I do not doubt but that you will be satisfied with the elderly though high-born consort I design for you. Captain Wohnarson!"

The officer stepped forward, and Christian, whispering a few hasty words into his ear, turned again to Rosen.

"I will be an excellent administrator of your property, Rosen; have no cares on that account. I thank you for it." And shooting a lightning glance over Brita Stenbock's impassive face, the King left the apartment.

Now below were heard bugle calls, announcing departure; in a few minutes the courtyard was lined with troops, and their commander gave the signal to march. Five horses, saddled, alone remained at the entrance door, belonging to Captain Wohnarson and his men.

These were not soldiers, but three assistants of the man who, now laying aside his "sponsor's" cloak, proceeded roughly to tie Rosen's hands behind his back. Though it may cost him his head, the officer standing by cannot refrain a shudder as he sees the executioner's assistant, coarsely laughing, bind Brita Stenbock to the young man, then chain both of them securely to the altar, erected for so different an office. It is done, and now turning with a laugh, the executioner exclaims:

"The wedding couple are ready. A gay bridegroom, a smart young bride. Bring the priest, that he may give the marriage blessing!"

One of the assistants springs to the kitchen, and soon returns. Grinning, he distributes the load he has brought among the others, and they betake themselves to the different rooms, contiguous to the one they have just left. Horror-stricken, the Danish officer flies from the doomed house, and mounts his horse. Five minutes later the others follow him at full gallop, often turning in their saddles to look back.

And now once more all is silent as the grave in Castle Torpa; silent, as in the ghostly hour when Karin Stenbock stood in her chamber awaiting the coming of the King. The first rays of the morning sun are shedding their beams through the tall, leafless elms upon the gray roof—yet it is still the ghost's hour in the Castle. Ghost-like lie the bodies of the dead Dalecarlians among their silent adversaries in

the dim passages; upon the blood-stained stairs the heads of the many victims still look up with glazed, wide-open eyes—no sound of life is there, of joy or of pain. A cry of anguish were Heaven-sent in the awful stillness through which, now here, now there, a low, crackling sound is perceptible, as though the massive walls were beginning slowly to give way under some invisible hand. Then a human voice breaks the stillness.

“Mother, do you hear it?” It is the voice of Gustavus Rosen, vainly struggling with his chains. With hands bound behind him, he is powerless to break them, and his arms fall helplessly back.

Brita Stenbock hears the sound he means, yet her answer is frigid as, when a boy, he stood before her chair awaiting punishment.

“I am not your mother, Gustavus Rosen, and I thank Heaven that it has preserved me from it. The marriage torch which Christian of Denmark has lighted for me is more welcome to me than if I had had to give my daughter, at this altar, into your traitorous hands. My blood, the blood of all these brave men who have fallen for Sweden’s cause, be upon your head!”

The crackling on all sides grew louder; a rushing noise, in the quiet of the morning hour, as of a storm of wind, roared through the corridors. Is it the dead who are awaking, and with heavy tread are stumbling among their companion dead to rouse them?

“Mother!” cries the young man, with de-

spairing voice. "You are Karin's mother. In her name, speak to me one last word. In one short minute we shall be where there are neither Swedes nor Danes—where forgiveness, mercy and love alone reign. Be merciful to me, mother!"

A shudder, perhaps for the first time in her life, passes through the woman's lion-hearted frame. With superhuman strength she strives to free her arms, as she vainly turns her sightless orbs in the direction of the pleader's voice. Then a gentler expression passes over her severe mouth, and she answers kindly:

"Your heart did not belong to our stern world. Heaven will forgive you, as Karin does, and as I do. Sleep in peace, Gustavus!"

Upon an eminence, some five hundred feet distant from Torpa, Christian the Second, surrounded by his suite, has called a halt. There is an impatient knitting of his heavy brows, as his piercing eyes are fixed motionless upon the Castle bathed in sunlight. Then the frowning brow relaxes. A rosy cloud hangs over the wide-spreading roof; coming from within the building, it is succeeded by masses of thick black smoke, amid which tongues of flame are shooting up. The west side of the Castle lies in darkness, while the windows of the east side are illuminated by the morning sun; now, however, in west, south—everywhere—are flames of fire shooting up to the sky; now round about they encircle the gray walls with a thousand

ruddy arms. A great volume of flame bursts from the roof, the southern gables give way and fall inward with noisy crash, and amid a shower of fiery sparks pieces of burning timber are shot out into the air. Revolving like fiery meteors, they fall at great distances, even to the verge of Trollhätta, and to the feet of the party of Danes looking on at the dread work.

Not a sound or sign of living being is to be seen or heard in the conflagration, save the frightened rooks flying out of the elm-trees. With the eye of a falcon, King Christian's gaze is riveted on the entrance door, and upon the area round the Castle. The dead do not move, and the living have not burst their bonds. Only when the gables fall in with a crash does the royal gaze turn away, and there is a dread smile upon his tightly compressed lips, as he says:

"That was your giant torch. Now, good-night to you, Brita Stenbock!" He digs the spurs violently into his black horse, making him rear again. "The wedding is over. We have had a right merry time at Torpa. Now your work begins again, godfather; keep to my side. Forward!"

And a minute later the spectators have disappeared from sight, and the burning, solitary house has an eerie look in the light of the smiling May sun, as if the old love which had grown in it were encircling it with its still sunny warmth which had endured through so many a summer and winter, until the tempest had come

to envelop it in flames, reducing it in one short night to ashes.

Tempests blow over, and flames burn themselves out; but the sun is eternal, Karin—coming back to us with every spring-tide, with the light of every successive morning, Karin.

King Christian the Second was right. Before evening Torpa had vanished from off the face of the earth. But Brita Stenbock's words were still truer. Sword and fire cannot kill spirits, whether they be of love or hate. And in them Torpa yet lives, as though it were still standing, looking over to Trollhätta. Neither in Sweden has it died, nor in the heart, Karin, for Torpa is eternal as is the sun.

It is evening again, and only thick clouds of sickening smoke rise over the ruins where the Castle once stood. And once more the jackdaws are crossing the Göta-Elf; but there are only five this time, who have issued from the rocky passage at Trollhätta, where they had passed the night; and who now proceed northward. The moon sheds its pale light upon the water as the broad boat again grazes the side of the opposite shore, where Karin, looking back, had called, "Farewell, Gustavus Vasa!"

He has fared well. If the earth could repeat the words now uttered to the youth who springs ashore from the swaying boat, it would say, "Farewell, Gustavus Rosen!"

"Farewell, Gustavus!" It is Ericsson and Brita Stenbock who say it, with friendly clasp.

of the hand. The close vicinity of Death had laid her hand in his, washing out all stain.

“Farewell!” He stands and hearkens to their footsteps as they die away in the distance: they come back to him as the last greeting of his former life, fainter and fainter, until they are lost in the distant roar of the Trollhätta. It is well to sit beside the Trollhätta for him who would fain forget; who would drown memory in the cataract’s perpetual roar.

CHAPTER VII.

BUT a few short weeks have passed; yet the spell of winter over Sweden is broken. Not from the south, but from the north, from out the rough valleys of Dalecarlia has spring come.

The name of Sweden's spring is Gustavus Vasa.

No other name, from lake to mountain, has brought help to Sweden save his. The nobility of the land lies shattered, and well that its power is broken and it is impotent—by carrying on the jealous feuds which for centuries has shaken and enslaved it—to undo the efforts of its deliverer. King Christian's soldiers still hold the towns inhabited by the rich burghers under their iron grasp. In wide area the country stretching between Copenhagen and Stockholm is devastated, the villages burned, the people either fled, or slain in battle, or executed. The gallows and the rack have marked the ruler's progress through his northern empire since the day he left Torpa. Death, his scythe, has passed over the sprouting fields, mowing down all it has met with in its passage, little and great, with cold impartiality. From every head laid low, Christian's moody

eyes have passed on to scan what shall next be his prey.

There are none to bring help to Sweden but the sturdy peasants of the Kjöl district. Thither have the Dalecarlians streamed, from vale and mountain, to the vast plains open to Heaven's blue vault, which spring has decked with cowslips, and to elect Gustavus Vasa to be the leader and ruler of themselves and of the Swedish nation.

And down the mountains marched Gustavus Vasa, with his hundreds. He crossed the Dal-Elf, and thousands flocked to his standard, for spring had come—and

A Vale man's arrow strikes home
To squirrel on tree or to ptarmigan;

but not less surely than squirrel and ptarmigan did it strike home to the well-armed horsemen sent out by the traitorous Archbishop Trolle, to oppose the Dalecarlians at Brunnbäck's Ferry.

They drave the Jutes in Brunnbäck's tide;
The waters they over them closed.
Full much they grieved that Christian's hide
Was not there to sink likewise—

runs the old triumphal chant.

The waters of the River Dal, dyed red with blood, bore the first requital of the massacre at Stockholm to the Gulf of Bothnia; and simultaneous with its tidings Gustavus Ericsson pressed on toward the south.

“I told you in Torpa we should meet again,

King Christian. You will not evade a meeting with me ere the Sound lies between you and Sweden!" was the challenge he sent, by a horseman, to the Danish King. But ere his challenge had been secretly nailed by night upon the door of the palace where Christian resided, Gustavus Vasa had a second time defeated the Danes, at Westerås, and his camp now comprised such numbers that it was no longer a peasant mob, but an imposing army which had advanced upon Westerås, held by the barber apprentice and father confessor of the Danish King, Slagböck. This too was stormed by Vasa's men—

The Jutes they cursed, and they sware full loud,
And set up such dismal howl
The devil was fain to mix them a brew,
By Dalekarls stirred, cheek to jowl.

Then, when the summer sun was at its height, and night scarce to be distinguished from day, the ancient citadel of Upsala yielded to Gustavus Vasa.

Here he halted. The impetuosity of his enthusiastic followers was splendidly calculated to conquer the Danish troops in the open battlefield, but to the tactics necessary to the protracted siege of a fortress-town like Stockholm his unskilled forces were unequal. They needed military discipline and practice in the use of arms. The weapons they were armed with were those they had used in agriculture or the chase: the ax, with which they cut down their mountain trees; the bow and sling, with which they

brought down the ptarmigan; the pike, which served them to guard their flocks from wolf and bear.

But Gustavus Ericsson's eye and hand were everywhere. Reckoning upon Lübeck's former offer of help, he had already applied to the Hansa town for a supply of fire-arms, and now himself began to train the inexperienced Vale men in the art of musketry. Leaders, chosen out by him, were sent out to all parts of the country to call the inhabitants to rise and train themselves into a fighting community. In every direction there started up small bodies of disciplined men, who, uniting together, attacked the smaller Danish garrisons and mastered them. Soon the whole lowlands were in the hands of the Liberator, and Christian's commanders found themselves compelled to retreat into fortified towns, choosing out seaports, like Stockholm, which could be continually re-enforced by the Danish fleet with men and provisions.

Brita Stenbock was right.

Within a few short weeks all Sweden had become a Torpa, and King Christian was gazing with gnashing teeth from his palace windows of Copenhagen, upon the Sound, which he had been obliged to cross again, because his refractory nobles had seized the occasion of his absence to excite the disaffection of the Danish people against his tyranny in his own kingdom.

However numerous, or small, were the companies of men fighting in scattered directions for

Sweden's freedom, they all readily enrolled themselves under Vasa's command, proclaiming him the ruler and leader of themselves and the Swedish nation. Thus Upsala became their headquarters; that ancient capital where, in the early days of history, the mighty race of the Ynglingers had reigned. The city was no longer built on the old site, but at some miles distant; a village, hidden under a grove of lime-trees, alone marked the spot where the ruins of the whilom capital of Scandinavia now lay, grass-grown and neglected. Among its scant houses rose an ancient church, with square granite towers; a Runic stone, let into the choir, bears an inscription in a tongue unknown to present generations. Close by the church, however, are three high hills, the "King's Hills," still dedicated by the country-folk to Thor, Freya and Odin; probably barrows of the Ynglingers, legendary witnesses to the period when the gods of Walhalla descended to found kingdoms and embrace the fair daughters of earth. Now thick beech-groves rustle on their summits, scattering their leaves over the rough-hewn granite blocks, pillows of the grim heroes who have made their last resting-places at their feet.

Sitting upon one of those huge stones, and looking through the tree-stems eastward, one looks upon the gray giant citadel of Upsala, whose aspect at once betrays that it was built by strong Gothic hand. Its double towers rise over the dark "Skog," the Swedish primeval forest which covers the vast plain with its tangled

masses of pine and fir-trees, alders and birches. Here and there a clearing along the verge forms the road, well made for the period, from Old Upsala to the new town, and granite blocks rest on masses of red porphyry, lie heaped pell-mell among the crumbled moss-grown rocks, with now and then a solitary fern lifting up its melancholy crest among the ruins. Yet a scorching midsummer sun, defying the northern latitude, lay over it all, making the few miles seem endless to the wayfarer ere he reached the Cathedral of Upsala, whose majestic nave towered like a giant among dwarfs, amid the almost general one-storied houses of the town. These were without exception built of wood, roofed with the gray bark of the birch. Monotonous as a northern sky was the appearance of Upsala, in which, half a century before, Sten Sture the elder had founded the first Swedish University. Now, for many a year, the Academic Chairs had stood deserted; the voice of learning had been silenced by the clang of arms, amid which the present generation had grown up; and mourning alike its ancient and later glories, the houses of the old capital grouped themselves round the Cathedral, the one remembrance of its proud past. Grass grew upon the pavements, no longer trod by the students' feet, more wont to hurry from than to the seat of learning. Silent and melancholy, as was Nature without her walls, lay Upsala. Few were the inmates to be seen in her streets; and those there were passed each other by with nervous, hurried greeting.

So it had been until the past few weeks; but one month of summer had availed to change the face of things. As it had clothed wood and field with smiling garb of green, so, as by a touch of the magician's wand, had it changed the deserted aspect of the town. Now the streets were thronged with people of most varied appearance. The knotty foreheads and fair hair smoothly parted in the middle marked the Dalecarlians, whose commanding stature seemed almost to overtop the low houses. With more grace did the supple sons of Gothland and Ingermanland move among them; while it was easy to distinguish amid the crowd the more intelligent features of the dwellers in towns, whose intercourse with the world beyond the Baltic had taught them more civilized Teutonic manners. In their costumes of richer stuff they seemed to seek the society of those whose dress and speech betrayed the foreigner. These latter were the deputation from Lübeck, ambassadors of the Upper House of Hansa, who had landed in Norrtelge, to bring to the adversaries of their ancient rivals in the Baltic a supply of firearms, and to form an opinion as to the importance and enduring powers of the rebellion; as also of the personality of its leader. With an air of wise, business-like reserve they had come; but soon the contagion of the general enthusiasm had affected them also; and in the accounts they sent back to the Trave every trace of mistrust in the success of a cause undertaken by Gustavus Ericsson had fled. Often they were to be seen

with him in public; still more often, in the dusk of evening, repairing to the modest dwelling in which he lived, seldom quitting it until the small hours. At other times they would mix gayly with him among the people, admiring with no business-like gaze the comely maidens of Upland and Gefleborg, who, with their sea-blue eyes and low foreheads, crowned with a wealth of fair plaits hanging down their backs, pushed unabashed through the crowded streets, laughingly receiving in the general holiday feeling many a too open expression of admiration, which when necessity required, they were not backward in repulsing with a strong hand. By day the camp erected in the fields adjacent to the town would be glittering with men undergoing their drills in the use of the various weapons; Gustavus Vasa himself exercising his eager followers. Riders upon their thick-set, short-maned, wiry horses, were to be seen firing from morning to night with the new-fangled arms which were the terror of the older men; the Lübeckers, in their freehanded wisdom, not having restricted themselves to the sending of muskets, but, unheeding the cost, having accompanied them with such a splendid store of ammunition that it would have been sufficient to serve an entire army for a war of some years' duration.

The house accommodation of Upsala was strained to the utmost to take in the number of civil and military guests who swarmed thither from north and south. But there was not an inmate who did not joyously turn out every nook and

corner for the reception of the deliverers. A spirit of admirable order, of northern uprightness and sobriety, reigned throughout the densely packed town; only of an evening, when the arduous military exercises were over, did the streets resound with song, principally the new "Brunnbäck" ditty, thus marking it was eventide while the sun, until an hour before midnight, was still high in the heavens.

But all noise and song is silenced, all heads are uncovered—the women lift their children in their arms, bolder maidens push their way in among the men, and the eyes of old people glisten with youthful ardor whenever Gustavus Vasa's tall figure is seen approaching.

And so they do now, as, in plain dress, and hardly taller than the men of his escort, yet with an inexpressible air of distinction about him making it easy for the merest stranger to identify him, Gustavus Vasa rides along.

It was the same face which, by Trollhätta, on that November evening, had first met Karin Stenbock's; only the brow more thoughtful, and, despite his youth, showing sign of many a furrow and shadow. A deep wound on the right temple too had left a broad scar, not looking as if caused by any sharp weapon of war; rather as though burned in, the hair about it seeming to be singed. Yet it detracted in no way from the manly beauty of his appearance, rather it heightened the imposing energy of his features and the fine eyes, which either reflected a whole world of thought, or, when half closed in meditation,

seemed to conceal it. No one could penetrate to the depths of those eyes, neither the true-hearted, simple Dalecarlians, nor the more wily merchant-diplomats of Germany. He who thought to know Gustavus Ericsson's most secret thoughts found himself often greatly at fault.

Nor did his escort, this afternoon, understand their commander, as they remained full an hour surrounding him, in the full blaze of a July mid-day sun, at the northern extremity of the town, while he, the indefatigable, sat motionless in the saddle, looking with unswerving gaze in the direction of Gefle. He must have been expecting some unusual arrival from that port that he, who hardly allowed himself rest at night and left not a minute of his day unoccupied, should so control his naturally impatient spirit, and, sunk in deep thought, appear to be oblivious of the flight of time. His escort exchanged in whispers their surmises as to the cause of his waiting, agreeing that it could only portend something of extremest importance; perhaps a messenger from Russia, or the arrival of a contingent of troops from friendly Lübeck. Yet the Hanseatic deputation knew nothing of any such aid; although, on the other hand, they were quite prepared to hear that the young general's all-seeing eyes, looking beyond them, had power to penetrate the secret councils of the ancient Trave City, from which proceeded might, influence, and, above all, the sterling Lübeck coin so richly harvested by its trade with the East. Thus they all were scarce less expectant than

was their general, as they, like him, looked anxiously along the sun-scorched road to Gefle.

Now a more eager look appeared on Gustavus Vasa's face, and a minute later the others became aware of a dark speck approaching along the dusty highway, slowly magnifying, until it became apparent to all eyes that it was the very unusual sight, in those parts, of an open traveling-carriage, of heavy build, drawn by a pair of strong horses. Two ladies sat facing them. One with silver-white hair, looking straight before her into the full blaze of the sun; the other, whose golden hair rivaled the rays of that sun, with eyes downcast, looking nervously from side to side. Now the carriage rolled past the group of waiting horsemen. With a certain amount of curiosity, but no special interest, some glanced at its occupants, while others continued their low conversation. Gustavus Vasa, with eager movement, raised his hat, bowing down to his horse's mane.

In a second every head was uncovered, all eyes turned with instinctive astonishment on the face of the young girl, who had been the recipient of the general's deferential and marked salutation. Without slackening speed, the carriage had passed on. Flushing crimson, the lovely girl had silently returned the eager bow, as for an instant her eyes of deepest blue rested upon the horseman's face. Then he, turning his horse, rode slowly back toward the town.

It was evident that that was all. Gustavus Vasa had waited for hours inactive, in order to

bow to a lady, and to receive a bow from her in return. With lightning speed the news spread in Upsala; and now it was the women's turn to indulge in surmises and suppositions. But no one knew who was the lovely stranger, or whither she had gone. All that could be gathered was that the carriage, skirting the town, had turned off eastward, taking the road toward Old Upsala. It was still early afternoon when it reached its destination. Close by the ancient church-tower was a pretty house of more pretension than the others in the village; there the carriage drew up. Men and maid-servants, standing in the entrance, received the newcomers with silent deference. Leaning upon her daughter's arm, Brita Stenbock descended from the carriage, and entered the house.

Had those piercing eyes of Gustavus Vasa overseen everything here too? With delicate thought all had been arranged for the comfort of the ladies that even Torpa could have offered, though on a smaller scale and with less of northern rigidity. The furniture and hangings bespoke the wealth and foreign relations of some great merchant city rather than Swedish simplicity. Had Gustavus Vasa then, while soliciting muskets and soldiers for the relief of Sweden, bethought him of fitting up a bower for the Rose of Trollhätta, whom he had torn from her home surroundings?

In truth this bower was more befitting her than the rough wilderness in which she had been sojourning, now here, now there, since that

night in which she had taken flight over the Göta-Elf with the jackdaws. She had not set eyes upon Gustavus Vasa since she had bid him farewell as his boat receded. Horses were in readiness, and her father had lifted her on to the saddle. Riding all night, by day they took refuge in lonely, scattered houses, whose inmates, informed beforehand of their coming, offered them ready hospitality.

Thus they had reached the wild, rocky mountains which form the boundary between Sweden and Norway. But even here they were not safe; wherever there was a Danish garrison orders had gone out to seize their persons, by the King's express command, a high price being set "upon the head of Karin Stenbock, whether living or dead." And now they pursued their way through the deep snow-covered mountains, ever further north. The way was difficult and arduous, taxing even a man's strength; yet Karin seemed to feel neither the fatigue, nor the cold and privation. With astonishment the hardy peasants looked at her delicate, girlish figure, which bid defiance to stormiest weather, hunger, or rough paths; while many a one, who had turned a deaf ear to manly persuasions, inspired by Karin's enthusiasm, would throw aside plow or spade, and repair to Dalecarlia, where report said Sweden's deliverers were assembling.

"I bid you, in the name of Gustavus Vasa," Karin would say, with glowing cheeks, and pass on.

When father and daughter came to long, lonely valleys, with nothing but their own thoughts to fall back upon, their way was dreary and mournful indeed. They knew nothing of what had happened since their flight from Torpa; nothing of the fate of the blind wife and mother, a prey to Christian's cruel vengeance. Not until they had crossed the Clara-Elf did a messenger reach them, bringing tidings of Brita Stenbock's rescue, who then was on her way to join them in the north by ship.

Shudderingly Karin heard the messenger's recital of how Gustavus Vasa and his four companions had awaited the departure of the Danes in the subterranean passage, and how he, at last, in his anxiety, braving the danger of certain death, had cautiously made his way among the dead bodies, and lying down among them, had heard what was passing. But even he had no idea of all that was to happen. He only heard that Brita Stenbock and Gustavus Rosen were to be bound together and left behind in the deserted Castle.

Next, he heard the noise below of the King's departure; and immediately after the red glare of torches fell across his face, coming nearer and nearer; a heavy, iron-nailed boot trod over his chest, there was a sound of crackling and roaring, and a suffocating smoke filled the corridor. Then, forgetting caution, heedless whether in the presence of enemies or not, he rushed toward the door of the room. As he tore it open he could scarce distinguish altar, or the

two forms bound upon it, for the volumes of smoke.

A moment later, and his sword would have cut their bonds too late; his arm, aided by that of Rosen, been too late to carry Brita Stenbock through the burning passage. Beams were tumbling on every side of them, a burning log fell with great force on Vasa's forehead, yet he succeeded in reaching the door of the subterranean passage with his burden, where, overcome by his superhuman efforts, he sank senseless in the arms of the faithful Dalecarlians so anxiously awaiting him. There they had to wait what seemed an eternity for the friendly shelter of night to reach unseen and unharmed the Göta-Elf, whence they were now continuing their course up the Wener Lake.

In breathless silence Stenbock and his daughter listened, with mingled tears of joy and sorrow.

Their home was devastated. Even as Brita Stenbock's eyes would never see it more, so theirs would never rest on it again. Yet what was Torpa compared with Sweden's freedom? Sweden must henceforth be their home. To Karin it seemed to come as an admonition from above that henceforth she must belong to her country, not only to the narrow space of earth on which her childhood's dreams had been passed.

And what was the destruction of the home compared with her mother's life, which they had deemed hopelessly lost, and which had been

saved by Gustavus Vasa at the risk of his own? A crimson flush suffused the girl's cheeks at this last thought. Did she recall the words spoken in Trollhätta's hearing: "This hand is free, Gustavus Ericsson, and belongs to him who shall bring two things to pass."

"Sweden's future be upon you, if it be lost for a woman's sake," had been Gustavus Vasa's answer, as he had sprung into the boat.

Had he fulfilled one of those two conditions? Karin's feverish cheeks, now hot, now cold, said yes. What had been the second? Could he fulfill that also? And if he did, and having done so, came to her and said: "It is done, Karin"—what then?

Then surely he had full, uncontested right to the reward which the eyes, those other eyes of Karin Stenbock, had promised him—to the hand he sought. And why not? The eyes which had a heart to give are forever quenched. No ray proceeded from them when the messenger told what had befallen Gustavus Rosen; her lips did not open to utter one word of inquiry concerning him. The light of those eyes is quenched, as are the flames at Torpa; the heart has become ashes, as are its ruins. Yet the embers under those ashes of Torpa are still glowing, Karin. One standing by them might deem them all burned out and dead; for the storm which has passed over them has subdued the hidden coal which, all unsuspected, still glows within its depths. But when the storm is over, when the

smoke disperses, and all again is still, when low and soft the breath of a summer breeze stirs the dead ashes—then the slumbering embers wake again.

And on went Karin by her father's side, awaking the embers sleeping under Sweden's ashes, with the cry:

"I bid you, in the name of Gustavus Vasa, the deliverer of Sweden!"

And again a thrill, half hot, half cold, passed over her. When Gustavus Vasa had accomplished Sweden's freedom, would he have fulfilled that second condition to which the Trollhätta had borne witness?

Not until they had reached West Dalecarlia did Karin meet her mother. There Stenbock left her, to join the army Gustavus Ericsson had raised. In feverish excitement Karin made the resolve to assume man's attire and take her part in the one most righteous aim. Care for her blind mother seemed to her less sacred than that desire, which even her father's strong will had no power to upset. In his perplexity he secretly applied to Gustavus Vasa to lay his commands upon Karin to give up her determination. As Sweden's General, wrote this latter, he required unreserved obedience from all who aspired to serve the fatherland. He, on his side, was carrying out Karin's wishes, and expected her to respect his will. It was his desire that she and her mother should now repair to Old Upsala, where a house had been prepared by him for

their reception. A carriage would await them at Gefle. The times of their departure and arrival in Upsala were minutely given. Gustavus Vasa's active mind grasped and ordered all things, small as well as great.

Thus they arrived at the house by the church in Upsala. Nothing in it needed arrangement or alteration. As though prepared by a woman's thoughtful hand, every corner of the dwelling told of careful supervision and refined taste. Nay, it told more, when one reflected that the ordering hand had been a man's and not a woman's. When one, moreover, pondered over the fact that that ordering hand had been the one in which lay Sweden's future, the conclusion must be that the fitting up of the lime-shadowed house by the church of Old Upsala betrayed more than careful supervision and refined taste; more, even, than a feeling of gratitude and of friendship.

And this was Karin's reflection as, toward evening, she meditatively walked out into the open air. She had spent the afternoon sitting by the window in uneasy musing, her eyes fixed upon the road by which they had come from Upsala. As though the excitement of the past few months had affected her nerves, she started at every noise—the chance opening of a door, or sound of a strange voice. Only as evening came on did her agitation subside, and going out into the garden which surrounded the house, she passed through it into the adjoining field. Amazed, she looked at the three King's Hills

which rose before her, and asked an old villager what they were and what called. Then, pursuing her way through the long, flower-bedecked grass of the meadow, she thoughtfully ascended Odin's Hill, the center one of the three.

The vast granite block on the edge of which she sat down was thickly bestrewn with last year's fallen leaves. It might have served as the Stone of Sacrifice when the hill commanded the surrounding country; doubtless the ancient Runic slab let into the church wall she had noticed as she passed told its history. It was a sanctuary in which, oblivious of the present, to think back upon the past and turn one's thoughts to the future. What mattered the happiness or sorrow of the individual in that great flood which bears centuries and tens of centuries upon its bosom to carry them along with it? How many voices had resounded about this stone when the mighty beeches whose summits were swaying in the evening breeze were but beginning to send forth their fibers into the earth? Who, in the lapse of centuries, and tens of centuries, would know anything of her who now sat there, looking out into the world as though it knew her aims? Not for enjoyment, nor for choice, but for duty are we placed in this world; to be helpful to others, and do what is right, even if it entail struggle and self-sacrifice.

Karin's lips murmured these last words half aloud. It was late evening, but the sun still

stood high in the heavens, shedding the curious, melancholy green horizontal light of a northern evening over the silent valley, the inhabitants of which had already gone to rest, to prepare for the next day's toil, to which the red glow in the east would soon call them. There was something strange and melancholy in sitting there looking down on to the sleeping valley, illuminated by broad daylight. Over the dark pine woods shone the distant spire, with its four gilded balls, of the Cathedral of Upsala, throwing their dazzling reflection into Karin's meditative eyes.

"What is the subject of your thoughts, Rose of Trollhätta?" asked a voice suddenly behind her.

Starting convulsively, she turned and faced Gustavus Ericsson. She had scarce seen him since the night she had saved him by means of the subterranean passage at Torpa, and had torn herself from his impetuous embrace. Since then Destiny had changed their parts; through that same passage he had carried her unconscious form when saving her from Christian's vengeance.

He had done far more; her sudden blush told how distinct was the remembrance; and yet she stood motionless, as she had formerly done at Trollhätta, when his strong arm had saved her for the first time. Her eyes wandered uncertainly over the broad scar upon his forehead, over his tall, noble-looking figure; yet her lips uttered no sound, and a look of disappointment

clouded his face, as it had then done. The happy, joyous expression it had first worn disappeared; and it was in a changed, hard, yet unsteady voice that he resumed:

“Do I again deserve no thanks, Karin? Do I still not deserve your hand?”

She misunderstood him. Her lips trembled; scarce audibly she murmured, hesitatingly:

“Sweden is not yet free.”

“You are right. You, at least, shall be so,” he exclaimed, in a voice agitated and unspeakably bitter, controlling with stern mastery the twitching of his features. “You would remind me that he who stakes his life for the cause of freedom should not do so for the sake of the reward; that he who fights for a people’s freedom must not endanger that of the individual. I give you back your word, Karin Stenbock, whether Sweden become free or not. Words have grown light as air since Christian of Denmark was in Torpa. Fare you well!” And before she had collected her thoughts to reply, he had turned and reached the foot of Odin’s Hill; there, swinging himself on his horse, he galloped furiously along the road to Upsala, Karin standing pale as death, as she watched him disappear. His horse was rearing and plunging, as if in fear, plainly showing the uncontrollable agitation of his rider.

This time the distance between them was too great; ere Karin, recovering herself, could utter a trembling “Gustavus Vasa!” he was too far

off to hear it. An unspeakable feeling of dread came over her, the sleeping valley and the mid-night sun turned round before her eyes. "Words have grown light as air since Christian of Denmark was in Torpa," she murmured, staggering a few steps back. Then suddenly all strength forsook her, and helplessly throwing out her arms, she fell prone by the ancient stone of sacrifice.

The next day Karin sought the same spot; but Gustavus Vasa came not. Day after day she sat on the Odin Stone, looking with eyes, large and immovable, in the direction of Upsala. She heard no sound but the rustle of the leaves overhead; the days were like years, so slowly did they pass; no news of the outer world reached her up there, nor did she desire any. She was busied with the world within her, and the leaves helped her as, weary from the summer's heat, they fell about her on the stone of sacrifice. Weeks passed. Everywhere, even to the shores of the Baltic, the Swedish arms were conquerors. Stockholm alone still stood out, and was invested by a strong army, aided by a contingent of allied forces from Lübeck.

The surrender of the town was hourly expected. Suddenly a cry of horror ran throughout Sweden, spreading with lightning speed from place to place. Gustavus Ericsson's mother and sisters, who had been detained as prisoners in Stockholm from the beginning of the War of Liberation, had, by command of Christian of Denmark, been foully murdered. Even to Old

Upsala the news spread. It was toward evening when Karin heard it; her informant adding that since he had received the intelligence Gustavus Vasa had been seen by no one. The greatest consternation reigned in Upsala; for he had shut himself up, refused meat and drink, and would see no one. Those listening long at his door maintained that they had heard Gustavus Ericsson weeping; but those who knew him would not give it credence.

Without remark, Karin slowly wended her usual way to the Odin Hill. Sitting upon the Runic Stone, as was her custom, she looked toward the west until the balls of the Cathedral tower of Upsala began to glitter in the evening sun; then, throwing herself on her knees before the Stone of Sacrifice, she laid her head upon the cold granite. Rising, she calmly descended the hill-side, not toward her dwelling, but in the direction of Upsala; and walked along the road, neither hurriedly nor slowly, until, having reached the town, she asked at the entrance gate for Gustavus Vasa's house. A little girl volunteered to show her the way to it. The officers standing about in the hall, harassed and perplexed, made way for her in amazement, and in reply to her question, shrugging their shoulders, pointed out to her the room in which their general had shut himself up, obstinately refusing to admit his most trusted friends. Quietly knocking at the door, she said: "Karin Stenbock desires to speak with Gustavus Vasa." And to the speechless astonishment of the bystanders

the obstinately locked door opened instantly, as if of its own accord. As quickly did Karin close it behind her, saying, as she looked earnestly into the pale, convulsed features of the man standing before her:

“The word of a Swedish woman is not like that of Christian of Denmark. I will be mother and sister to you, Gustavus Vasa.”

CHAPTER VIII.

It was autumn again. A whole year had gone by since Gustavus Ericsson had first met the Rose of Trollhätta. Much evil and misery had in that time been caused to Sweden by Christian of Denmark; much joy and consolation had Gustavus Ericsson been the means of spreading over it, since the earth had run its course round the sun, and autumn had once more come round—a warm, sunny autumn of the north.

Under the high, whitish-blue canopy spread by the heavens over Upsala towered the golden balls of the Cathedral spire, glittering afar, in the slanting rays of the midday sun, over the ever-green trees of the primeval forest, over rocky crags and brushwood, even to the lofty tree-tops, tinged golden-brown, of the King's Hill, and to the mirror-like Lake beyond. All seemed bathed in blue and gold, heaven and earth alike. And as radiant was the joy reflected in the blue eyes of the men, women and maidens of Upsala. Over two miles long was the procession crowding along the broad road leading to Stockholm; not from Upsala alone came the people, but from

west and south of the Swedish kingdom, even to the ice-bound shores of Norrland and Norrbotten. Expectantly every head was turned toward the south. From that direction he was coming—"he" none needed to name him of whom they spoke—no longer "the leader and captain of the common Swedish nation," but the King of Sweden, Gustavus Vasa.

For a week past the "nobles and commons of the Swedish Kingdom" had held parliament at Strengnäs; two days had passed since the assembled parliament had elected Gustavus Ericsson to be King of Sweden.

And now he comes; his countenance radiant, with look more gentle than his subjects had ever seen him wear before. The warmth, the glory, the sunny joyousness of that autumn day lay over him. In kingly apparel, his ermine mantle hanging down the sides of the horse which bore him so proudly, he rode beside the milk-white steed of Karin Stenbock, "the royal bride of Sweden." She too bowed sweetly, right and left. She wore no ermine, but the rejoicing people acclaimed her perhaps the more for her great loveliness and the wealth of golden hair which streamed about her from under the golden circlet on her brow. So had ridden Freya upon her golden-maned steed from out the gates of Walhalla to give light to earth, as Karin of Sweden makes her entry into Upsala. So Freya suffered her divine eyes to rest upon the faces of those to whom she came to bring happiness, and, looking upon them, smiled.

Suddenly the smile fades from Karin's lips, and a thoughtful, strangely grave expression passes over the sweet face. Hastily she raises her white arm resting upon her horse's mane. Something comes flitting toward her, borne upon the still air, and she seizes it with her hand—a white butterfly, with brilliant red spots upon its wings. Fearlessly it sits upon her hand, spreading out its exquisitely shaped wings as though resting upon the edge of a flower. The women, seeing it, point it out to the men; the royal butterfly of the mountains has come down to the vale to greet Sweden's Queen.

Why looks Sweden's Queen so absently, so dreamily at the white butterfly, last messenger of summer, that she is oblivious of the silent rejoicings of the crowd as they welcome the peaceful omen? Does her ear hearken in the still air for sounds out of the west? Is there in it an echo, soft, very soft, and oh, so far distant, of the roar of the Trollhätta?

No; the Trollhätta is too far away. It is the rustle of the beeches on Odin's Hill, as they wave their greeting to Karin's thoughtful gaze, swaying in the autumn breeze against the sky. A roll of drums, as the procession reaches the first house in Upsala, causes the royal bride to start out of her dream. The mayor, surrounded by the corporation, bending his knee before his King, greets him with loyal address, patiently listened to by the Sovereign, but who, as evidently, breathes a sigh of relief when it comes to an end. The procession continues its course,

all know whither; the streets through which it passes are changed into a forest, the ground into one monster carpet of green rushes and fir cones. Now the ancient Cathedral rises majestically before them. Under the principal entrance the Archbishop of Upsala stands, in full canonicals, awaiting them, surrounded by all his clergy. A tall, reverend-looking priest, it was evident from his whole appearance that he took a very different view of the solemnity of his office from that which Pope Julius the Second's legate had done, now going throughout Germany to collect indulgences.

Despite his long ermine mantle, the young King threw himself lightly from his steed, then lifted Karin from hers. Both bowed to the Archbishop, who, raising his hand in blessing over their heads, preceded them up the aisle to the altar. In marvelous beauty and purity of form rose the Gothic pillars, tall and slim, as though they were bundles of sheaves, to the giddy height above, where they supported the ancient baldachino-shaped roof of the nave. Through the rose-shaped panes of the colored windows was diffused a subdued, soft light, which melted curiously into the blaze of the countless wax candles adorning the altar, covered with altar-cloth of rich golden embroidery. The retinue of the royal pair took up a large portion of the vast Cathedral; and behind it thronged a dense mass crowding every available space, climbing even in breakneck hardihood to the stone copings of the lofty windows in their

endeavor to catch a glimpse from outside of what was going on within. For within the magnates of the land were celebrating the marriage of King "Gösta" with Karin Stenbock.

But just as the solemn function was about to commence, a messenger, making his way through the press of people to the King, whispered something in his ear, which so greatly moved him that, with abrupt apology, and assurance that he would quickly return, Gustavus Vasa, following the messenger, left the Cathedral. Wonderingly the throng looked after him, leaving his lovely bride thus standing beside her father and blind mother; and an eager whispering ran through the holy edifice. But it was as quickly silenced, for in a very few minutes the King reappeared. With radiant expression he advanced to the archbishop, as he said:

"Grant me permission, Your Grace, to precede you in your address. The words I am about to speak will not desecrate the altar before which we stand, for they are sacred, and come as much by grace of God as those which will proceed from you."

And mounting the steps of the altar, he said, in a loud, clear voice which resounded throughout the building:

"Heaven sends two greetings to the people of Sweden. Stockholm is ours. At sunrise this morning the Danish commander delivered up the keys of the capital."

As with one voice a tremendous cheer burst

from every lip. The last, long-hoped-for goal was reached—Sweden was free. The passionate joy of the multitude was not to be stilled. People embraced and kissed each other; thousand-voiced rose the cry to the lofty aisle, and ascending to the very roof, reverberated back again:

“Long live Gustavus! Sweden is free!”

“And will remain so,” rose Gustavus Vasa’s voice, at length, above the rejoicings; “for I have yet another tidings for the people of Sweden. My envoy, whom I dispatched to the Emperor Charles the Fifth, has returned. The German Emperor breaks off his alliance with his brother-in-law, King Christian of Denmark. He recognizes Sweden as a separate kingdom, and offers it his friendship; while the Danish people, rising against King Christian, have forced him, abject and despised, to flee the country.”

And now a voice was plainly heard through the jubilant acclaim which followed the words. It was the voice of Brita Stenbock, saying:

“I see you, Christian of Denmark, powerless, deserted, despised, abhorred. I see you striking your pallid forehead, laden with your people’s curses and the scorn of men, against your prison walls. I see the ghosts of Stockholm jeer and laugh at you through the iron bars of your window, and how they strike terror into your abject soul, frightening you back to life, because you fear the Throne upon which you do not sit, and before which you are arraigned! One half has

been fulfilled, Christian of Denmark, the other awaits you!"

A shudder ran through all present, so demoniacal was the laugh with which the blind woman accompanied the words; its hard, uncompromising tones striking against the pillars like winter's ice broken up by the Falls of Trollhätta, to be dashed against the rocky promontories of its shores. Brita Stenbock's eyes were dimmed, but her hatred was not dead. Over land and sea it followed her mortal enemy, startling him out of exhaustion, sleep and despair; driving him on ever further to his destruction.

For one moment Brita Stenbock stood, a very specter of vengeance, erect upon the prison windows of the future, staring like the dead of Stockholm into Christian's maddened features—then she fell back exhausted into her daughter's arms. She quickly recovered herself; but her agitation had communicated itself to Karin, whose eyes were sparkling with a singular light as the King, now taking her hand, led her to the altar, whispering:

"And so the second condition is fulfilled the very instant before I make you mine, Rose of Trollhätta—Sweden is free!"

She did not look at him; she only said:

"Yes, every condition is fulfilled now. Sweden is free."

"And you are its Queen."

He felt a quiver run through her; a quiver of mingled pride and fear.

Firmly she advanced upon the velvet carpet spread before the altar.

“In the name of Almighty God, I greet you, King Gustavus of Sweden, who have been chosen as their King by the nobles and commoners of this nation. Many races of kings have come and gone in this sacred spot. A priesthood of another faith, the faith of the mighty sons of Odin, placed the crown upon the heads of the Ynglingers. Yet they fell as autumn leaves, and their memory is forgotten. And the haughty House of the Folkungs here received the crown from the hands of the heralds of the Gospel, and were anointed with consecrated oil from Rome. But it has ebbed away like the waves of the sea leaving no trace behind. Many another has come after them, in long succession, with great names and haughty mien, from North and from South, and they have been anointed and consecrated. But where is their memory now? For it is not the anointing oil in the hand of man which can make the lowly great, or ennoble the mean; it is the Spirit of the living God, who is Justice, and Freedom, and Humanity. He alone it is who can also enlighten the mighty of the earth that their memory may not be lost; their days not flee away like dust before the north wind. Therefore I greet you in this ancient capital, Gustavus Vasa, and joyfully lifting up my hands to the Great King above us all, I give Him thanks.”

Thus began the exhortation of the grayheaded archbishop. Given forth from his broad, power-

ful, manly chest, the words rolled solemn and sonorous over the uncovered heads of the vast congregation. As the wind swells the sails so did they swell the breast of every Swedish hearer, picturing as they did a peaceful, proud future to the Fatherland, and good will among men. Perhaps upon none did they have a more powerful effect than upon Karin Stenbock, thrilling her every nerve, as she looked up admiringly to the noble, majestic figure at her side, to the man whom she heard lauded as the instrument of Heaven, worshiped of his people, and who had chosen her out among them all to finish the work with him. After the battle to spread peace over Sweden; after the triumph of the sword to found the sovereignty of justice, happiness and good will among men. Yes, for the first time Karin looked proudly and happily upon the white ermine which hung from the shoulders of her royal consort. It was as if she heard a murmur from it, as from the beeches on Odin's Hill: "To be helpful to others, and serve the right."

How differently things had turned out from what she had then thought. How differently might a queen fulfill the device which the sun's rays were illuminating in the sleeping world of her soul from what she had then thought. In this case duty was her choice; her proud, happy choice. And proudly and joyously did Karin's eyes rove to the lofty vault above, during the archbishop's exhortation, then rest again upon the listening throng about the altar.

Suddenly, with convulsive start, the azure

eyes grew fixed, staring as if bewitched at the red porphyry pillar to the right of the altar. Daylight did not penetrate there, nor even the light of the wax candles; only a reflection of both diffused a magic haze about it, half bright, half somber, resting strangely upon the head of a spectator who, his gaze fixed immovably upon the altar, leaned against the pillar. Something ghostly as was the light invested the pale countenance. It was impossible, in the distance, to tell whether he was young or old. The features, as well as the tall, slender form, were young; but the thick hair, growing low upon the forehead, seemed a contradiction; it had once been fair, and even now had a golden shade upon it, but the appearance was as if it had been strewn with ashes, and lifeless as ashes were the eyes; more lifeless still than Brita Stenbock's sightless orbs, who attentively listens to the archbishop's earnest, jubilant words, as though she were seeing into the future.

Many a look among the attentive congregation had been turned toward the girl who, but a few short minutes since, had been made their Queen; thus, following the direction of her eyes, many had turned their heads to seek the fortunate person upon whom those eyes were resting, as they whispered:

"Who can it be leaning against the pillar with that remarkable countenance? I quite believe the Queen is looking at him."

"Silence!" said another, checking the talkers. "It is the King's envoy, just returned from the

Emperor of Germany. No wonder he is struck at the angel bride our Gösta has found in his absence. It is plain to see he has never set eyes on such a lovely face before. But hark to the Archbishop—the most important part is coming. Quiet!”

The whispering stopped; all eyes were turned upon the dignified Prince of the Church, who now took from a costly jeweled golden bowl the plain gold ring, emblem of faithfulness alike of queen and peasant. Karin Stenbock's eyes alone moved not; fixed, as they were, upon the expressionless ones of the man leaning against the pillar.

“Karin,” said those mute, lifeless eyes, “on the verge of Trollhätta the ancient Bard stood, looking down into its mysterious depths. Around him was life, the sun shone upon him, the flowers nodded to him, the birds sang; the while his soul quailed at the roaring abyss stretching out its white arms to him. How often would he not have fled from it! yet a spell lay over him, compelling him to look down into the rushing, thundering cataract, until, involuntarily and gradually drawn nearer and nearer, vanquished by the Spirits of the Deep, he sprang into it, and the dazzling foam closed over him.”

The Archbishop, taking the cold, rigid hand of the royal bride, slipped the plain gold ring upon her finger. There was breathless silence in the Cathedral.

“Karin,” said the mute, lifeless eyes of the

man against the pillar, "were those the lips which said: 'Do not grow weary, poor Gustavus. Were your arms ever to grow weary and the current to seize me, it might be too late, and you unable to save me from it.' Were those the lips that whispered: 'Do not forsake Karin.' Was it to Gustavus Rosen that they had said: 'I love you so dearly, Gustavus—so dearly'?"

"Almighty God guard and protect you, King and Queen of Sweden. May He guide your hearts for your own happiness, and the well-being of your country. May He shed the light of His countenance upon you, and give you His peace."

Like any simple yeoman, Gustavus Vasa, stooping, kissed his wife.

As if starting from some long dream, the sapphire eyes of the Queen, slowly turning from the face by the pillar, wandered vaguely over the snow-white, flowing ermine which fell from the shoulders of her royal consort. Her feet seemed to give way under her; shudderingly, she stretched out her arms, and with the terror-stricken cry: "You are the Trollhätta!" fell swooning into the King's arms.

One person alone in all the vast building understood her words. Very few, indeed, had heard them. The distant crowd only saw their young Queen fall fainting into her royal husband's arms, who held her pressed close to him. They did not see how lifeless was the

form the King supported in his strong arms. Tenderly he held her, whispering words of endearment into her ear.

"You are to blame for this, our lady mother," he said, turning reproachfully to Brita Stenbock. "What is past is dead, and should sleep. Why awake the shadows of Torpa to disturb the happiness of to-day?"

The blind woman made no answer, but her daughter raised herself from her husband's supporting arms.

"The shadows of Torpa—" she repeated, passing her hand over her forehead, "as you say, are dead— The past is dead, and must sleep."

And taking her royal husband's arm, Karin walked down the aisle with him, with firm step. The suite followed closely after them; then the dense crowd pressed out with cheers and rejoicing. In the space of a few minutes all had left the vast Cathedral save the one person who alone had understood the Queen's words.

He still leaned against the pillar. The altar lights were extinguished, the light of day now alone came dimly through the colored windows of the Cathedral; yet the mute, lifeless eyes still rested upon the empty space before the altar. So they remained fixed, until the verger, waiting to close the Cathedral, came up to him wonderingly.

"Are you not well, sir?" he asked at last, respectfully.

Then Gustavus Rosen, with a start, looked at him as if collecting his thoughts, and silently left the building.

Outside, as the bridal procession had crossed the Tyrisö bridge, King Gustavus, bidding his coachman stop an instant, pointed out a green eminence on the west side of the town, which, overlooking Upsala, stretched gently away toward the south.

“There we will build our castle and be happy together,” said he softly, leaning toward his young bride.

She raised her eyes.

“Yes; from there we shall overlook the trees on Odin’s Hill,” she answered, gravely.

Now all streamed after the royal pair to the house which the town had set apart for the marriage feast.

It was the most stately-looking building in Upsala, and, with early dusk, a grand banquet awaited them in the spacious apartments. At the head of the table, upon two chairs bearing the insignia of royalty, sat the first royal couple Sweden had seen for full half a century. On Gustavus Vasa’s left sat the benign-looking prelate of the kingdom. Much and weighty talk, despite the joyous character of the feast, did the King exchange with him upon the new tone of thought which had arisen in Germany, south of the Baltic. The great merchants from Lübeck listened with satisfaction to the words so oft-recurring in the King’s mouth. Then,

raising his goblet, in clear, sonorous tones, he exclaimed:

“My lords and gentlemen of the Swedish nation! My first toast shall be to the Freedom of this land! You have learned that it lies not in the hands, but in the heads, of a nation. That a people at all times can shake itself free of slavery, whether its arms be chained or not, so that its spirit is enlightened. The Freedom I mean, and that I bring to you, does not depend upon the fall of Stockholm, nor upon the dethronement of Christian of Denmark. It is not a thing of earth; Heaven has committed it to one greater than I to publish it far and wide. I drink, according to the solemn practice of the Fathers, to the spread of the work of the Monk of Wittenberg, that it may avail to burst Romish fetters, there and here—I drink to Martin Luther!”

Hardly a man, surrounding the long table, but sprang up enthusiastically to honor the toast. As a lighted spark it went to the soul of every one; yet all eyes were fixed in anxious expectation upon the tall, venerable figure on the King's left. Then a ringing cheer burst from every lip; with firm hand, raising his glass, the Archbishop clinked it against Gustavus Vasa's, as he said:

“To the health of Martin Luther!”

Karin's goblet, too, struck her husband's with clear ring.

And now, according to old Swedish custom,

the "Skäls" followed one upon another, many and frequent. A singular resemblance, and yet a singular contrast, the table presented to that which last spring had seen spread in the now wrecked walls of Torpa. Many of the same faces were to be seen round it here, but bearing what different expressions! A happy freedom from care breathed in Stenbock's powerful face; his blind wife, sitting beside him, had lost the frigid expression hers had worn for the last time in the Cathedral that day; and once again by the side of a King of Sweden sat Karin.

This time not a trembling Karin with fevered cheeks, now pale, now flushed; but one with steady, earnest eyes, looking lovely and peaceful; lovely as the mild autumn which lay over Sweden's new-found freedom, peaceful as the beech-trees of Odin's Hill reaching up to the blue sky above.

And at the end of the long banqueting table sat a guest, silent as he had sat at that other table at Castle Torpa. His lips made no sound, he touched neither meat nor drink. Across the wavering light of the many candles illuminating the table his eyes looked upon the Queen of Sweden, beyond her, far, infinitely far away; and, as in a dream, they saw a little Karin Stenbock. Through the wall of the banqueting hall those eyes looked out upon a rocky valley, through which the Trollhätta was rushing and tumbling; and with her golden hair flooded by the soft light of a spring sun, Karin was standing, saying:

"Do not cry, Gustavus. When I am big, I will go with you to Denmark."

The clatter of glass, the noise of voices drown the low words spoken by the dream vision, which, so infinitely far, yet so sunnily bright, met the mute, lifeless eyes of the man looking beyond the Queen's chair. Now the vision, smiling through her tears, says, pleadingly, with sobs in her voice:

"Do not cry, Gustavus. I will be your wife, and then I shall be your mother, and, together, we will go to Denmark."

A tear fell from the eyes of the silent guest upon his silver platter. Once more Gustavus Rosen started, as the voice of his neighbor, on the right, said sympathetically:

"Are you not feeling well, sir?"

Rising without reply, he would have silently left the banqueting-hall as he had before left the Cathedral; when his eye met the King's, who, simultaneously with him, had risen from his chair.

"The King is going to speak; silence!" ran from mouth to mouth. Every voice was stilled; and Gustavus Vasa said:

"We have drunk to the health of many a hero, to whose brave deeds in forwarding the cause of the freedom of Sweden we have all been witness. But many a noble service has been rendered it in silence, known to but few. Many a fight been fought, seen by no eye, although perhaps hardest of all. I would drink to those who

needed first to conquer themselves, ere they could recognize the eternal justice of our cause. I drink, with this toast, to the man who undertook the difficult task by alienating the German Emperor from his relative's interests, to win him over to our cause; and who, having undertaken it, has brought it to a triumphant conclusion. To him, but for whose courage the noble mother of your queen would not have been among us to-day; and to whom your thanks, as well as mine, are due—to you, Gustavus Rosen!”

At a draught the King emptied his goblet, all following his example. Gustavus Vasa thought only of that night at Torpa on which he had rescued the two condemned to a cruel death; on which Rosen, acknowledging his fault, had taken upon his own head the whole awful guilt of it, had confessed that he had been cognizant of the King's guilty purposes, and, as penance, had placed his life at the service of his wronged country. Then, with wise foresight, Gustavus Ericsson had confided to him the mission to Charles the Fifth.

Had he in view at that time another more private interest in the banishment of the young man? Doubtless, unconsciously, and now long since forgotten. In his memory, Karin's "Never" had usurped sole place, when asking her, on the waters of the Göta-Elf:

"Would you fain go back to Gustavus Rosen?" she had answered:

"Never! Between him and me lies an abyss

deep as the Trollhätta between these two shores. My heart no longer belongs to the man who has betrayed Sweden."

What did Gustavus Rosen understand of those eyes of Karin which belonged to Sweden's cause? What does Gustavus Vasa know of those eyes of Karin which had loved Rosen?

Sweden is free.

Did Gustavus Ericsson's envoy to the German Emperor deem that therewith he might atone for another wrong-doing? Did he think, returning, to be permitted to say, "I was blinded, when I betrayed Sweden—now I have borne my part in the salvation of your country and mine!"

The way is far from Trollhätta to the Alps. When Gustavus Rosen reached Upsala, the Cathedral bells were ringing, all the bells in Sweden were ringing, to celebrate the marriage of its queen.

It was a noble, chivalrous King to whom she had given her hand. A man, strong, wise, and noble. There was not a maiden throughout all the land of Sweden that day who did not envy Karin's lot; maybe, too, there was many a man among them who would not have valued Gustavus Vasa's crown as less worth than the white pearl, which, rising from out the foam of Trollhätta, now sat, enframed in gold, by his side.

She, too, raising her eyes at the King's last words—"To you, Gustavus Rosen!"—stood up. One look, the first she had given, was directed

to the far end of the table; for one short second the Queen of Sweden had vanished from her gold-crowned chair, and the far away vision from beyond her came into her place, and stood alone, and solitary, in the banqueting hall of Upsala. Then Karin looked away, and it disappeared again into the infinite distance, unattainable—irrecoverable.

And night sank over Upsala, and midnight came, and with it silence in the marriage-house of Upsala. Deep stillness lay over the length and breadth of the Swedish kingdom; and a northern light alone, streaming high up into the zenith, shed its luster over the old capital.

CHAPTER IX.

GOLDEN broke the next morning over the liberated country. The young King had magnanimously allowed the Danish garrison in Stockholm safe conduct to Denmark. Justice and humanity began, with him, their reign in Sweden. The warmth of an unusually fine autumn lay over the newly recovered freedom. What had never been known before was seen then; the next year's seed springing up, making the fields green, as far as the eye could reach, and the fruit-trees covered, for a second time, with white blossoms. Spring seemed to have embraced autumn with brotherly love, and forever to have broken winter's stern sway. Rejoicing, the people gathered the plenteous harvest into their barns, regarding the royal pair with reverence, as deities to whom they gratefully attributed all the blessings, with which, after its many years of vicissitudes of war and oppression, the land was overflowing. More especially did they look upon it as the gift of Karin, whose eyes were unwearied in seeking out the needy; who, wise as old age, lovely and winning as youth, revealed in all her actions,

not the Majesty, but the Duty which encircles a crown.

Her ear was open to all; and the faces of the country folk beamed with hope when her white horse, seldom followed by more than a groom, was seen approaching the outskirts of their village, while the children would rush indoors with shouts of joy to announce that the "Good Queen" was coming. The King rejoiced to see how she won all hearts, far and near. Sometimes he would accompany her in her expeditions; more often duties of State, connected with the new Constitution of the kingdom, would detain him in Upsala. Then Karin would ride out alone into the light of the autumn sun, her groom following at some distance behind. Thoughtfully she would look into the distance, often unheeding that her horse, feeling his rider's hand grow slack, would stop altogether. Whatever her thoughts might have been, her lips spake them not, even to herself. Her favorite direction was toward the lake, where, from an eminence, she could obtain a wide view of its blue surface. Then the groom knew that hours were as minutes to his royal mistress; yet she was never displeased when, at length, riding up, he would respectfully point out that the sun was sinking behind them. Silently, at his remark, she would turn her horse and ride back, and the inhabitants of the places through which they passed would see no change in the expression of the lovely face, calm and peaceful as ever. Thus, to-day, she

rode homeward from the sea. It was exactly a year since she had first met Gustavus Vasa on the banks of Trollhätta; and longer than she was wont to do had she remained on her favorite spot, gazing fixedly out into the immeasurable distance, to where, beyond the wide lake, earth and sky melted into one and the eye could no longer detect where one ended and the other began. And, turning away at last, she rode back until, on her right, the square tower of Old Upsala Church appeared through the leafless trees.

A sudden fancy must have seized her. She raised her eyes to their tall summits, commanding the village from the King's Hill, then, signing to the groom to go on toward the town without her, she turned off in the direction of the hill. Skirting the village, she reached the foot of Odin's Hill through fields, then, alighting, left her horse free.

"You will wait for me, I know," she said softly and in a strange tone, laying her hand upon his slender neck. "You will carry me back to the King's house."

Slowly she made the ascent. It may have been her long habit, or the leaves so thickly strewing the ground, which impeded her way; for often she stood still, resting her head, as if wearily, upon her hand. Now she had reached the summit; the setting sun sending its dazzling rays full into her face. Horizontally it shed its greenish, melancholy light over the silent valley, over the brown beech leaves which lay,

all fallen, thickly bestrewing the Stone of Sacrifice. But Karin knew every single portion of it as accurately as if her heart's blood had dropped on each. Mechanically she moved toward the spot where her strength had forsaken her when Gustavus Vasa had rushed from her in his wild anguish; and where, later, sinking upon her knees, she had pressed her forehead upon the cold granite, before herself taking the way to Upsala. Her feet staggered now, as they had done then; an expression of wild anguish distorted the young queen's face, usually so calm, as though an awful cry, no longer to be repressed, were about to burst from her heaving bosom.

A sudden crackling among the dry leaves made her look up in alarm. Her eyes caught the reflection of the sun upon the gilded balls of Upsala Cathedral streaming toward her across the dark pine wood; but its golden rays were intercepted by the tall figure of a man leaning motionless against one of the beech tress. And now he, too, slowly turning his head, uttered a bitter cry.

It was Gustavus Rosen.

Over the leaf-bestrewn stone, the blue eyes were looking up to him as of yore they had done in old childhood's days. Meeting his, they looked into each others', speechless, motionless, for the space of a minute, then—

Then, with convulsive sobs, the young man, turning away, strode down the hillside toward the meadow.

"Gustavus—" cried Karin. Hearing it, he started, but still went on.

"I command you, Gustavus, stay! Your queen commands—"

It was not spoken in tone of command; an expression of woe unspeakable spoke in the tone of the imperious words. It did not compel, it pleaded. Sad unto death was the look of the face he turned upon her as he came back.

With firm step, Karin advanced toward him. The anguished look in her face had disappeared; her breast no longer heaved; she was calm, as were her eyes, calm as the autumn air about her.

"We must take leave of each other for a while, Gustavus—" Her voice did not tremble; she had taken his hand in hers, and held it in a firm clasp. "We often had to do so as children, when the sun went down, and it always rose again." As she spoke, she pointed with her other hand to the red, fiery ball whose last departing ray fell between them, as from the lofty beech-tree overhead the last withered leaf fluttered down upon her golden hair; taking it, with sorrowful smile, she gave it him. "I have many flowers of remembrance from springtide's days from you," she said, "they blossomed on the other side of the Trollhätta. Now it is autumn, and I have nothing to give you in remembrance save this poor leaf."

He held out his hand for it, and clutched it so vehemently that, crackling, it broke. For

the first time he opened his lips, whisperingly, in order to control the trembling in his voice:

“Tell me only one thing, Karin, and I will take leave of you in peace—tell me only one thing. Are you happy? Do you love Gustavus Vasa?”

The queen turned her eyes to the gilded balls of the Cathedral spire.

“The woman who possesses him for her husband is blessed above women,” she answered, in a low voice.

“Do you love Gustavus Vasa, Karin?” he repeated the question with trembling, powerfully controlled emotion.

Into one second of time was crowded the turning point of two lives; and Karin, raising her blue eyes to those of the man she loved, said in firm, calm tones: “Yes.”

The sun had set; the night wind rustled chill through the autumn air. A wild, despairing cry burst from Gustavus Rosen’s breast; in mad frenzy he stretched out his arms, and clasped her impetuously to him. But she determinately freed herself.

“The queen of Sweden may go unprotected in any hut, in the solitude of any wood. Will you be the cause that she may no longer do so, Gustavus?” she said, gravely.

Tears streamed down his face; his arms fell powerless to his side. But her arms were once more round his neck, her eyes were looking—concentrating all the joys of the past in that one last look—into his eyes: “Farewell, my

Gustavus!" she breathed, rather than said, and drawing still closer to him, kissed him—and in the dusk of the evening the white horse of the queen was seen shooting, like a white star, past the dark, pine wood, along the road to Upsala.

Calmly, as was her wont, she entered her husband's house, and laying her hand upon his forehead lingeringly, lovingly, smoothed away the lines of care from it. For there were many cares to cloud the young King's brow and chase sleep from his eyes. And sleepless, says the chronicle, lay the King that night. Then Karin, opening her lips, spoke; and he, bending over her, heard her say in her dreams:

"Gustavus, the King, I love full well;
But Gustavus Rosen can I ne'er forget."

Ne'er — nevermore! — the waves of Mälär, hearing it, murmur it further, and the Hjelm-mar Lake bears it on over the immeasurable waters of the Wener Lake to the rocky gate through which the green current dashes headlong. Then come the Falls of Trollhätta.

They advance like a man's Fate, peaceful, transparent, kissing the nodding grasses bending over them. Then there comes a slight whirl, a faster rush, imperceptible, unforeseen—and the peace, the transparency is gone, never to return. And now they rush on more impetuously, inevitably, ever lashed more furiously, until, suddenly, they are precipitated, raging and tumbling, into the engulfing depths below, from

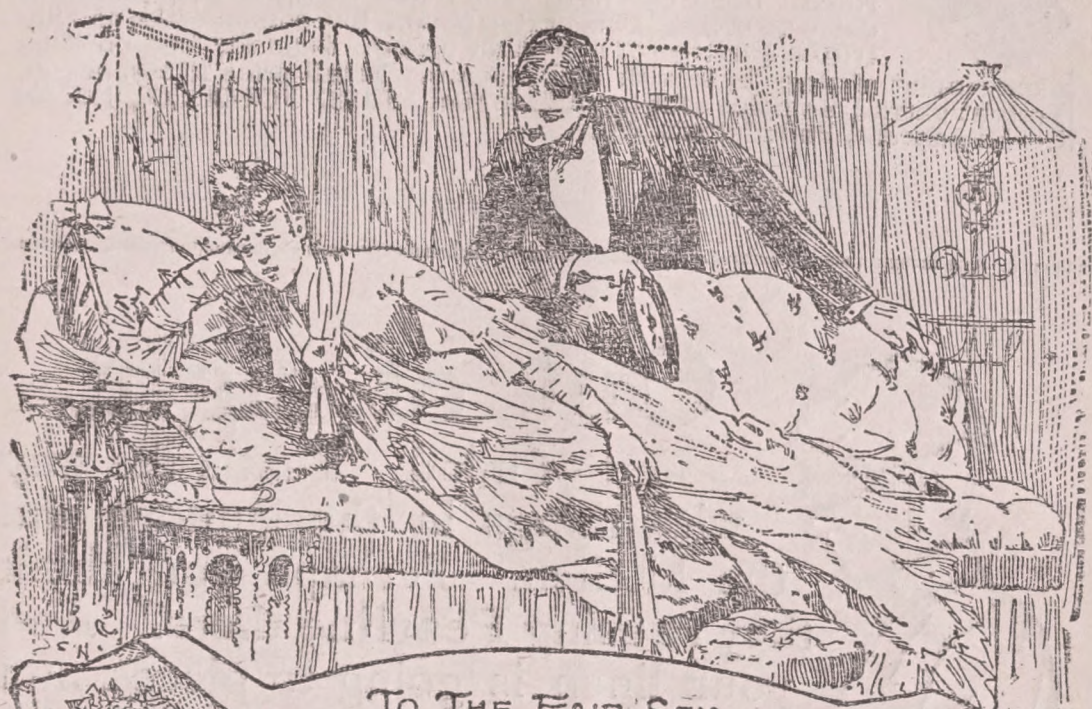
which there is no rescuing arm now held out to save.

These are the Falls of Trollhätta, which have roared and rushed for days, for centuries past. The boy who once played beside them has grown into the man; the man into the veteran who crawls out, leaning upon his strong staff, to gaze for the last time upon them. They are the same as when first he saw them, wreathed in flowers like spring, silver-white as winter.

They have rushed and roared for thousands and thousands of years before any human ear was there to hear them. Far over the rocks they sprinkle their silvery dust, upon which the sun's rays are reflected back, shining and sparkling, in rainbow hues. Deep down beneath, though, under the dazzling, majestic veil, roll and toss the tumbling, angry masses of water.

It is well to sit beside the Trollhätta for him who would fain forget, who would drown memory in the cataract's perpetual roar.

THE END.



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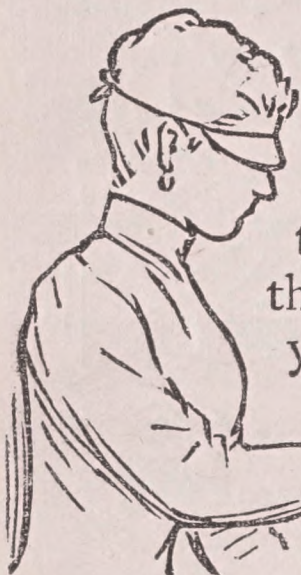
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